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President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The President: This morning the Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rakhmonov (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, permit me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to your important post as President of the General Assembly. We are convinced that thanks to your wisdom and experience you will successfully guide the deliberations of this important forum.

Over the past century mankind has made unprecedented strides in its overall progress. It has demonstrated with unprecedented force the creative genius and potential of the human mind. But at the same time, unfortunately, it has highlighted inherent human failings that are the root causes of tremendous social and political upheavals, the further exacerbation of global problems and the emergence of new challenges.

One of the most significant achievements of the twentieth century is the founding of the United Nations, with its indispensable legal framework and mechanisms giving it the tools to organize collective action on the part of States in order to counter current and future threats.

Tajikistan would like to see the strengthening of the United Nations and of its Security Council, as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is extremely timely and useful, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, to rethink philosophically the lessons we have learned in order to define the principal parameters of a future world order and to develop a programme of action to put them into practice.

We see many valuable and mutually enriching ideas in such initiatives as the convening in the year 2000, at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and the millennium summit; the proposal by Russia to elaborate a concept of peace in the twenty-first century; the idea of Iran of a dialogue between civilizations; and the plans of a number of States regarding a culture of peace and other initiatives.

Tajikistan, for its part, intends to continue contributing, insofar as it is able, to this intellectual endeavour aimed at encouraging all States to join their

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efforts and concentrate on the main areas of international cooperation.

Having won their independence eight years ago, the people of Tajikistan have made their choice in favour of democracy. Although our movement towards the reform of the political system and market transformations in the social and political sphere has been seriously tested, despite all odds we have risen to the challenge. Today we can state firmly that we will not veer from the road we have chosen of building a democratic, law-abiding and secular society in Tajikistan.

The most recent proof of this are the results of a popular referendum on amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, held on 26 September last, which have demonstrated growing support for efforts of the Government to establish lasting peace and accord in our country and, on that basis, to build up further civil society and to form stable democratic institutions.

Many States have needed hundreds of years to reach today's level of democracy. Tajikistan, like other new or restored democracies, will have to cover that distance within a shorter period of time while gradually tackling difficult and complex tasks in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas. It is clear that this will require timely, adequate and coordinated support from the United Nations, and we look forward to such support.

I wish to note with great satisfaction that the transitional period provided for in the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan has entered its final stretch. Thus the way towards further strengthening of the fundamentals of peaceful democratic development has now been opened up.

In this context of critical importance, we are looking forward in the next few months to presidential and parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, which we hope will be successful with the necessary assistance from the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Now more than ever before, the peace process in Tajikistan needs active support, particularly material and financial assistance from the international community. We hope to see remedied very soon the situation wherein donor States allocated only a small percentage of funds pledged in response to the appeal made this year by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan. We would like also to express the hope that at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, as in previous years, full support will be forthcoming for the draft resolution on granting international assistance for post-conflict projects in Tajikistan.

The Government of Tajikistan, despite great difficulties, has consistently been implementing a programme of economic reforms in order to create an effective market economy. Step by step, an appropriate legal framework is being set up to provide a favourable environment for the development of small and medium-sized businesses, for foreign investments and for the promotion of market institutions, including in the areas of finance and banking.

The efforts of our Government are being supported by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and a number of other influential and authoritative international financial and economic institutions and agencies. At this new stage of development resulting from the transformation in our economic and political systems, we in Tajikistan are counting on the international community to provide as much support and assistance as it can.

The disparity in the value placed on human life and tragedy depending on whether one is in Europe or elsewhere is cause for profound regret. If a hotbed of tension flares up in Europe, it is contained and eliminated on the double. And this is wonderful. However, it is particularly hard for us to bear given the large-scale conflicts that have been spilling blood in Asia for decades. And is Afghanistan really not a European problem — Afghanistan, whose drugs are destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of unfortunates, including in Europe? Afghanistan is not just Asia's pain and tragedy. It is Europe's, too.

We are extremely perturbed by the continuing intra-Afghan conflict. The international community must take all necessary steps to restore peace in Afghanistan as quickly as possible. It is unthinkable that the 20-year civil war that has already wreaked such irreparable losses on the long-suffering Afghan people should turn into a new 100-year war and continue into the third millennium.

We are deeply convinced that the only way to put an end to the long-drawn-out bloodshed in Afghanistan is through a political settlement to the conflict which would have as its cornerstone the formation of a broad-based Government that reflects and protects the interests of all

political, ethnic and religious groups and strata of Afghan society.

We are sure that the main thrust in any settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan should be towards strengthening the leading role of the United Nations as the key mediator between the parties in restoring peace and achieving national reconciliation: the efforts of other international organizations, and of States, should complement and reinforce the work of the United Nations; they should not be undertaken in isolation from it, much less run counter to it.

In the context of strengthening the central role played by the United Nations in coordinating international efforts with regard to Afghanistan, the "six plus two" group of friends and neighbours must redouble its efforts. We believe that the Security Council should once again very seriously review the situation in and around Afghanistan and that it should take action, including imposing sanctions against those who are violating Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Engulfed in the flames of conflict, Afghanistan is the source of the many dangers, destabilizing the situation in Tajikistan, the whole of Central Asia and far beyond. In the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, active bilateral and multilateral cooperation is under way on countering the penetration from Afghanistan, and the proliferation in our region, of militant Taliban ideology, weapons, crime, terrorism and various forms of extremism.

I wish in particular to stress the seriousness of the drug problem. Specifically, the protracted war in Afghanistan has turned that country into one of the world's main drug centres. The Taliban movement has chosen an extremely dangerous course in turning the territory under its control into a gigantic drug production and distribution factory and warehouse. Also, despite appeals from the international community, this factory of death continues to increase its output.

In this context, I should like to remind the Assembly of the proposal I put forward at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly in June 1998 (A/S-20/PV.2) to create a "cordon sanitaire" around Afghanistan that would put a covering force along the drug routes out of that country. This idea was conceived because, given the current social and economic conditions in our country, it is no simple matter for Tajikistan to guard its 1,500-kilometre frontier with Afghanistan reliably. There is also a trend towards using Tajikistan not only as a transit route for drugs but also as a reprocessing station, and even towards expanding the market with Tajik consumers, all part of the plans of international criminal groups to destabilize the situation in our country. Still, the bulk of the drugs finding their way into our territory is still destined for transshipment to other countries, primarily European ones through Russia and the Transcaucasus. In this sense, the Tajik-Afghan border is the first line of defence for many other States, and the joint efforts of Tajik and Russian border guards to plug the leaks in it are serving the interests of a substantial part of the international community.

We note with satisfaction that our appeal has not gone unheeded and that over the past year there has been a breakthrough in Tajikistan's cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), whose leadership's support for the measures taken by the Government of Tajikistan to combat drug trafficking is becoming ever more active.

Under the agreements and projects reached and developed between the Government of Tajikistan and UNDCP, a number of specific activities are planned to increase the anti-drug capabilities of law enforcement agencies and the military, in particular those operating in areas adjoining the Tajik-Afghan border. An anti-drug agency reporting directly to the President of the Republic has been established. Cooperation between Tajikistan and UNDCP is a shining example of how efforts can be combined in order to fight shoulder to shoulder against one of the most terrible human evils. We are open to this kind of cooperation with all interested States, international organizations and institutions.

The world has recently been witness to brazen acts by international terrorists who are increasingly operating under the banners of political extremism and religious fanaticism. Tajikistan shares the view that the fight against terrorism is one of the most pressing problems facing mankind today. Suffice it to mention the situation in Afghanistan, which confirms that narco-dollars are helping create an environment favourable to terrorism. We condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and deem it necessary to coordinate the actions of the entire world community to eradicate this scourge at the global, regional and national levels. We think it would be useful to convene, under United Nations auspices, a year-2000 conference to decide on joint organized world

action to combat terrorism; this will be discussed at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

Tajikistan has consistently supported United Nations efforts in the sphere of environmental protection. We appreciate the growing United Nations attention to the serious ecological problems facing our country and other States of Central Asia. We hope that the approach of the year 2000, which the United Nations has declared the International Year of Mountains, will help mobilize the international community's potential to help preserve biodiversity and natural mountain ecological systems. This is of particular importance to Tajikistan as a predominantly mountainous country.

We note with satisfaction that the leadership of the Secretariat, in particular Under-Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello, is showing increasing interest in cooperation with our country to ward off the threat of a major natural disaster in the Central Asian region related to the problem of lake Sarez.

In this context, we believe it is time to focus world attention on the question of fresh water in all its aspects. Therefore, Tajikistan has proposed that 2003 be declared the International Year of Water. This initiative is prompted by the menacing deterioration of a situation in which millions of people lack access to clean water. It is well known that because of water pollution half of the world's population lives in unsanitary conditions; more than 5 million people a year die, and more than 3 billion become ill. As the population increases, the likelihood of "water wars" between States for sources of fresh water grows ever greater. Issues of water and other challenges of the new age are thus directly linked to problems of security in the context of interdependence.

In addition to its humanitarian aspects, the problem of water has other dimensions, in particular economic and ecological ones. Water is our common heritage, and it is necessary to ensure that all States share in the responsibility to preserve it for the benefit of future generations. Constructive global cooperation could become a worthy political dimension of the twenty-first century, and could guarantee that this will never acquire a military aspect.

We hope that the international community will respond favourably to our initiative on the resolution of water problems, which are of crucial importance not only for Tajikistan, which is rich in water resources, but also for the majority of other States Members of the United Nations.

It is vital to repair broken links and to create a new model for relations, particularly in the area of transport and communication. Addressing that key task will to a large extent determine the development in the next millennium of all Central Asian States that lack an outlet to the sea; these include Tajikistan.

My people has drawn new strength from peace and stability. The construction of a railroad, industrial enterprises and social infrastructure is now under way along the ancient historic Great Silk Road, which runs through the territory of Tajikistan. This year we are completing construction of a transboundary route that will give us access to the sea. That is our contribution to restoring direct communication among individuals and peoples along an ancient route that in the Middle Ages served as a bridge between East and West and that made possible dialogue among civilizations.

We expect that in the near future goods will flow along this route in both directions. This will undoubtedly foster better mutual understanding among all peoples of the East and the West, and also will have a positive effect on strengthening regional security and cooperation among neighbouring countries in Central Asia.

Experience has shown that turning to one's own roots is always a powerful means of spiritual therapy, especially for those who have overcome the tragedy of a fratricidal war and are entering a period of active post-conflict reconstruction. Now we are at the stage of renewal and of building a new democratic society, and we look back once more at our long history. At a time when, with active support from the United Nations, the process of national reconciliation is nearing its objective, our country is celebrating the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of the State of the Samanids, which marked the birth of Tajik statehood. We express our appreciation to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and to all the States and international organizations that responded to our appeal and have supported efforts to undertake international activities devoted to this momentous anniversary.

The age of the Samanids was not only a time of an unprecedented flourishing of science, culture and philosophy and of the emergence of Tajik statehood. It was also the time of the birth and blossoming of the mediaeval humanism that so enriched world civilization.

Allow me to express the hope that in the third millennium, now so close, the humanistic ideals will illuminate for the world community the arduous road to universal peace, sustainable development and peaceful construction.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Tajikistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I next give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Botswana, His Excellency the Honourable Lieutenant-General Mompati Merafhe.

Mr. Merafhe (Botswana): I take great pleasure in congratulating you most warmly, my dear brother, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Your great country, Namibia, and its illustrious leader, President Sam Nujoma, have been very generous indeed in allowing us to benefit from the prodigious knowledge and experience you command on the workings of the United Nations, having spent the better part of your life in this institution. We are confident that under your seasoned leadership the fifty-fourth session will serve as a fitting climax to a tragic century. My delegation is ready to render you all the support you will no doubt need in carrying out your onerous responsibilities.

Your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, has earned our admiration and gratitude by the exemplary manner in which he presided over the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We thank his country, Uruguay, for allowing us to tap his wisdom and benefit from his leadership skills.

Our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his team in the Secretariat have continued to discharge their responsibilities with unstinting devotion. The problems they have to deal with, and/or seek solutions to, are enormous, and yet they remain undaunted. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude.

We warmly welcome in our midst three new members of our Organization, Nauru, Kiribati and Tonga. We wish them the best and assure them of our friendship and solidarity.

Despite the many horrors of the twilight of this turbulent century — the civil wars, the rampant terrorism in many places and other acts of savagery committed against millions of our fellow human beings all over the world — we have made commendable progress in the past few years in the maintenance of global peace and security and the consolidation of freedom and democracy. An increasing number of the world's nations have organized successful elections in the past few years, many with the help of the United Nations. In two weeks' time, my own country, Botswana, will for the seventh successive time in a generation afford its citizens another opportunity to exercise their democratic right to choose their leaders.

Political pluralism may not have taken root in all the corners of the globe, but it has undoubtedly enthralled the imagination of all peoples yearning for freedom. It has become the weapon of choice, a powerful one at that, against tyranny. Democracy is, of course, not necessarily a foolproof panacea against all the societal imperfections that are our natural inheritance as human beings, but we believe that only in societies where the rights of all citizens, their fundamental freedoms, their beliefs, their culture, are protected and allowed the fullest expression possible under the law, can peace prevail. Peace is a prerequisite for development, for sustainable development.

At independence in 1966 Botswana was regarded, and rightly so, as an abject basket case, the poorest of the poor of the emerging African nations. Our desire to be free in those inauspicious economic and political circumstances was derided by those who did not wish us well as nothing more than a suicidal wish.

Today, a mere generation later, my country prides itself on having one of the fastest growing economies in the world, thanks to the peace and stability we have enjoyed since independence and the wise utilization of the few resources with which our desert- scarred and drought-prone country is, thankfully, endowed.

Democracy has been a way of life and second nature to Botswana. We attribute our peace and stability to it. We cannot, of course, forget the support we were given by the international community, particularly during the early years of our independence.

This is why we welcome the end, at long last, of military rule in Nigeria, a country whose importance to our continent and to the world at large cannot be gainsaid. A vibrant democracy in Nigeria will have a powerful effect not only on the west African region, but also on the continent as a whole.

We pledge our support to our Nigerian brothers and sisters in their struggle to nurture their democracy and to reconstruct their economy as well as to rehabilitate their institutions. We reiterate our aversion to coups and military rule, and laud the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Algiers decision to the effect that from now on those who overthrow Governments by means other than democratic elections will face isolation by our African community.

We welcome the signing in Togo recently of a peace agreement between the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone and the rebels. We understand fully the circumstances which compelled President Kabbah to sign this peace agreement. We hope the agreement will bring peace to Sierra Leone. We urge the international community to contribute generously to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of that devastated country.

The Great Lakes region in Central Africa remains unstable, despite the signing recently of an Agreement to end the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The signing of the Agreement by its Government and its Southern African Development Community (SADC) allies and the rebels is the first step in a difficult journey to peace in Central Africa.

The Agreement will, however, amount to nothing without the full support of the international community, in particular that of the United Nations. We therefore urge the Security Council, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to become actively involved in the full implementation of the Lusaka Agreement. Time is of the essence.

The case of Angola is a very sad one. The departure of the United Nations from that war-ravaged country has left a void, which has abetted one of the deadliest conflicts that has ever afflicted Africa. In the absence of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission, it is not possible to assess accurately the magnitude of the slaughter, the starvation and the general mayhem caused by disease and landmines in Angola. Nevertheless, we call upon the international community to intensify its efforts to end the tragedy, and we firmly believe that the tragedy can be ended only by the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

We further call upon those among us who continue to give Savimbi's rebellion sustenance to cease doing so. We must all cooperate in ensuring that sanctions imposed against UNITA are effective.

We welcome, in this regard, the Security Council's recent establishment of panels to investigate violations of the sanctions imposed against UNITA and to find effective ways of tightening them. It is our fervent hope that the panels will not only be able to reveal the identities of UNITA's merchants of death, but will also advise on how such violators of United Nations sanctions could be deterred from defying the will of the international community.

The bloody war that has been raging between the East African neighbours of Eritrea and Ethiopia may be experiencing a lull as we meet here, but the fact, in our view, continues to be that this terrible war does not make sense. It is a war of brothers who, more than anyone else, should have found it easy to sit down to discuss whatever differences might have arisen between them. We urge our two fellow African countries to embrace each other under the OAU-brokered peace agreement and to make peace.

The question of Western Sahara has been on our agenda for too long. We urge the parties to redouble their efforts to conclude the identification process so that a referendum can be held to decide the future of Western Sahara once and for all, as called for by the OAU summit in Algiers.

The decision by Indonesia last year to allow the people of East Timor to decide their future as they saw fit was hailed by my country — and, I am sure, by many others across the globe — as a momentous and wise one. We lavished praise on Indonesia for this decision, fully conscious of the fact that it could not have been an easy one to make.

The decision was quickly followed by the equally momentous Agreement signed in May this year between the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal, on one hand, and the United Nations, on the other, by which the people of East Timor were to decide their future through a referendum. We were therefore disappointed, to put it as mildly as I can, by the tragic events that followed the holding of the referendum. The unleashing of militias on

an innocent population — which had, with so much dignity and calm, voted in a referendum, as invited to do by Indonesia and the United Nations — deeply disappointed Indonesia's friends, including my own country. The destruction of Dili, the capital of East Timor, and its environs by the militias ennobled no one, including Indonesia, and deserves our censure.

Now that the East Timorese have unequivocally stated their preference, which is independence, they should be afforded all the assistance they need to fulfil their national aspirations without hindrance. Relations between the soon-to-be independent State of East Timor and the Republic of Indonesia should be cordial, and it is our hope that this will be the case.

The resuscitation of the Wye River Memorandum and its implementation recently have given a needed fillip to the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This gives us hope for the final phase of the negotiations that have just begun. We urge the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians to persevere in the quest for peace in the Middle East.

In the past few years we have witnessed a proliferation of summits and major conferences aimed at building a consensus on issues as diverse as women and development, youth, the environment, human rights, population and social development, human settlements, education and health. We have also convened conferences to address the dangers of weapons of mass destruction and to intensify the campaign against landmines. If summitry and conferences alone were the solution to the world's ills, our planet would by now have become a wonderful place to live. But this is not at all the case.

The cold war may have ended, but the old danger or threat posed to the security of humankind by weapons of mass destruction remains. This is, as always, exacerbated by the build-up of conventional weapons beyond the legitimate requirements of self-defence. Once again we urge those concerned to show political will and commitment by taking progressive measures to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating them.

The adoption by the OAU of the Pelindaba Treaty and the establishment of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone has demonstrated Africa's commitment to an early conclusion of a legally binding instrument to avert the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. We will continue to work assiduously with our partners in the developing world to pursue efforts aimed at ridding the southern hemisphere of all weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

Landmines have continued to maim and kill innocent people. We must redouble our efforts to ban their production, stockpiling and use. We must all become party to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

The challenges of development have become more formidable in today's globalizing world. Increased integration of markets and the rapid transfer of technology and of other innovations, as well as a wide array of economic, social and political relationships, band our nations together and dictate a common destiny for our peoples. To survive the global competition, we in the developing world must timeously and adequately respond to the opportunities and challenges facing us. In order to do so we need to vigorously pursue strategies that will increase trade prospects. We need also to raise the productivity of our labour force and the quality of our human resources. It is crucial that in our pursuit of sustainable economic development, the basic tenets of democracy and good governance be upheld at all times and never be sacrificed.

At the Algiers summit of the OAU, our leaders had substantive discussions on how to harness the forces of globalization for the benefit of the African region and for the prosperity of our peoples. They solemnly committed themselves to striving to ensure that globalization does not transform Africa into a marginalized bystander. We recognize, however, that to move forward, the entire international community has to be fully engaged. This would by no means be merely a charitable act, but rather an investment in global peace and security.

The United Nations, as a universal forum, is uniquely placed to promote international cooperation by addressing the challenges of development in the context of interdependence. However, this can be achieved only if the United Nations is provided adequate financial resources. We note with deep concern that the last five years have seen a steady decline in the resources of the United Nations Development Programme, the leading operational arm of the United Nations.

Far too many of our people live in abject poverty. Far too many die of preventable diseases such as

tuberculosis and malaria. Unemployment remains pervasive, especially among the young.

Africa's economic recovery and growth potential continue to be frustrated by the mounting foreign debt. Despite the numerous relief efforts, a durable solution to the problem has remained unattainable. My delegation acknowledges the efforts being made through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative in 1996. But while the HIPC Initiative can be a catalyst in the search for the solution, it cannot be the solution itself. To reach the heart of the debt problem, it is imperative that the debtors and the creditors acknowledge the seriousness of the problem and work together to strike a compromise that could yield long-term results.

We appreciate the efforts being made by the Bretton Woods institutions and the donor Governments to address the debt problem, particularly the seminar recently held in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, chaired by the President of Botswana, Mr. Festus Mogae, whose results we hope will be followed up. We still believe, however, that the permanent solution to Africa's debt problem should go beyond the mere rescheduling of the debt-payment period to outright cancellation and debt forgiveness.

The alarming rate of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is undoubtedly the most worrisome and urgent problem facing sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana being one of the hardest-hit countries. My Government is responding with an aggressive national information and education campaign to combat this destructive disease. The achievements made so far in the health sector and the economy are in jeopardy.

The advancement of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against them in many societies are yet to be achieved. Women and young girls are still subjected to all manner of brutalities.

The plight of millions of children who are conscripted into armies in various parts of the world is an outrage. The images of children being conscripted and trained to participate in senseless wars caused by the folly of adults dehumanizes us all. Everything must be done to discourage this evil practice and to punish those who insist on perpetrating it. The Government of Botswana fully supports the work of the Special Representative of General Assembly for Children and Armed Conflict and remains fully committed to upholding all the international legal instruments on the rights of children. My delegation attaches great importance to these issues and urges the community of nations here gathered to join their efforts in the search for solutions to these socio-economic problems.

In turning now to the reform of the United Nations, let me briefly say the following: A wise man adapts to circumstances, as water shapes itself to the vessel that contains it. So says a Chinese proverb. That the United Nations, particularly its Security Council, needs to adapt itself to the era in which it exists today, I think is axiomatic. The fact that the Security Council's undemocratic composition is an insult to the overwhelming majority of the Members of this Organization is also, I think, self-evident and recognized as such even by those who would, if allowed, keep this important organ as it is.

Africa, demands to be properly represented in the Security Council in both categories of representation. We will never tire of insisting on our demand for three additional non-permanent seats and at least two permanent seats.

Let me conclude by once again wishing you well, Sir, in your tenure of office as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We can assure you that our commitment to the United Nations remains as strong as ever. This Organization, I am sure we all agree, is irreplaceable.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Bolivia, His Excellency Mr. Javier Murillo de la Rocha.

Mr. Murillo de la Rocha (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The men of the Andes scrutinized the skies to decipher and predict the future. If they were looking at the skies today, they might not manage to understand the message written there. On the one hand, there is the promise of unlimited prosperity, with man in apparent control of nature and his environment, thanks to the outstanding strides made in knowledge, the tireless flow of data and financial resources, the almost genetic transformation of the means of transportation and communication, the growing empire of freedom and the reaffirmation of democratic values on a global scale.

On the other hand, however, the new millennium is arriving with disquieting signs. Financial crises are increasingly frequent and ever more acute. The gaps between the haves and the have-nots are widening. Confusions, fear and uncertainty prevail over a large part

of the planet. Thus must one see both sides of globalization: one of promise, the other of threat.

The effects of the two aspects of the process are felt in Latin America with singular intensity. The crisis of the financial markets and the constant decline in commodity prices have struck at the heart of the economies of our societies and subjected them to pressure, in some cases intolerable. Nothing seems to be in its place and few dare to anticipate the future.

Nevertheless, the men and women of Latin America have a right to keep hoping. My own country maintains a very cautious optimism. Not many years ago, Bolivia felt with particular intensity the tragedy that is affecting other nations of Latin America. Drug trafficking, the external debt, the collapse of mining and the crisis in the political system all conspired to create a picture of confusion and anguish that seemed to be insurmountable.

What we have done since then belongs to history. I shall summarize it here for no other reason than to share our experience, because our task, far from over, seems to have only just begun.

Tired of sterile and debilitating political confrontation, Bolivians decided to take the road of cooperation and dialogue. The coalition Governments on which the political system has been based and nurtured since the early 1980s proved the intelligence of an old constitutional norm, but they also showed that the letter of the law is worthless if it is not steeped in the spirit in which it was written. It was in the spirit of questing for consensus that the political Constitution was reaffirmed, the true independence of the National Electoral Tribunal was guaranteed and the Constitutional Tribunal, the Judicial Council and the Office of Ombudsman were established. Lastly, institutions and social organizations were incorporated into the discussions of the major problems affecting the nation in a dialogue that President Hugo Banzer, at the start of his mandate, called on to support the Government's work with a broad civic consensus.

Mr. Morel (Seychelles), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this rapid summary is that the economy cannot be modernized without a solid base of political reform. Indeed, it was on that political foundation, on the basis of the will of the people represented by the parties, that we were able to make strides in modernizing and opening up the Bolivian economy. We controlled inflation. We renegotiated and reduced the external debt burden. We transferred control of public companies to the private sector, and we created the conditions for the sustained development of Bolivia.

However, when we seemed to be achieving the impetus required to launch that development, the Asian crisis and its effects on our region abruptly slowed down the rate of our growth, after almost a decade of a modest increase in per capita income. The storm will pass, undoubtedly, but I cannot deny that the legitimate expectations for development have been affected by this sudden and unexpected return of old fears.

We know how Bolivia managed to control its economy, and you have already heard the figures that show how the reserves grew, the way the fiscal deficit was reduced and the mechanism that enabled us to go from an inflation rate of more than 20,000 per cent per year in 1984 to 4 per cent in 1998, just to mention the most significant data.

But there are other things that are sometimes overlooked. One is that the process of structural transformation requires perseverance and time. Bolivia persevered, perhaps because it had had difficult experiences. Nevertheless, more than a decade was necessary to come out of that emergency situation. The other element is that what was built in years of sacrifice can be lost in a moment of inattention or rashness.

With all the limits and difficulties that were involved in the transition process that began in the early 1980s, the living conditions of Bolivians improved significantly, as we see in the data that was published in the last United Nations Human Development Report. Public spending on education increased from 2.1 per cent of the gross domestic product in 1985 to 5.6 per cent in 1997. Illiteracy in young people under 15 years of age was practically eradicated. Between 1976 and 1997 the mortality rate of breast-fed infants dropped from 144 of every 1,000 live births to 69, and life expectancy grew from 45 to 61 years of age in the same period. However, we have to say that the growth rate is still insufficient and unfair.

As in other countries, development was focused on a particular segment of Bolivian society. Therefore the fight against poverty is the main task of the Government of President Bánzer. Thus the cornerstone of that strategy is the active participation of the very sectors that had been ignored in choosing ways and means through an

intelligent and active decentralization mechanism. There is full awareness that access to the means of production should be added to the effort that has already been made in allocating resources to social, educational and health policies.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when we began the democratic stage I have just described, illicit drug trafficking cast a long shadow over development in Bolivia. At the critical moment of the collapse of tin mining, the cultivation of coca leaves employed thousands of families of unemployed workers and became a major source of income for the Bolivian economy. Even worse, however, was that the risk that drug trafficking would infiltrate the economic and political system became a real possibility.

The situation today is radically different. Bolivia will emerge from this coca-cocaine cycle in the next three years, within the timetable President Bánzer set for himself when his mandate began in the face of the scepticism of all, friends and critics.

In August 1997, the land occupied by coca plantations exceeded 40,000 hectares. In the 25 months of the implementation of the Dignity Plan, 25,000 hectares have been removed and the remaining 15,000 will be eliminated in the time-frame planned, or earlier. The undeniable success of that plan can be explained by the conviction of the Bolivian people that the drug-trafficking cancer had to be eradicated from the body of national society.

President Bánzer had the merit of interpreting that decision and of making it concrete, making it an irrevocable State policy. He applied it without altering even a millimetre of the structure of democratic institutions and without breaking the spirit of civil peace and security which my country fortunately enjoys. The occasional moments of friction that arose in the beginning were brought under control, and the police forces were required to carry out their tasks with the utmost respect for human rights.

The international community has pointed to the Bolivian strategy as one of the most successful and pragmatic ones of the continent. I must say, nevertheless, that the task has not been completed, and its support is essential to create sources of work and productive and legal development opportunities for the farmers who are no longer involved in the cultivation of coca leaves. Only in that way can we claim victory.

The century ends in Latin America with the good news of the peace agreement between Ecuador and Peru and the announcement that very soon Chile and Peru will end years of patient work in order to resolve the matters pending from the 1929 treaty. These are very important events, to which we must add the treaties through which Argentina and Chile resolved their disputes along their extensive border. In that way, the countries of this part of South America altered the legacy of confrontation and conflict that men of other times and circumstances left behind.

However, there is still an open wound in the conscience of America, the injustice of the landlocked situation of Bolivia, which has existed for more than a century. Members know very well how Bolivia lost the extensive coastal strip that it enjoyed when it achieved independence and the enormous cost that loss represents for the development of my country. It is, undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for Bolivia's backwardness, as I pointed out in my message last year with more detail and precision.

I can affirm that my country has made all possible efforts to find a friendly and peaceful solution to its landlocked situation. We have left no stone unturned in every forum in which Bolivia participates. We uphold our request for sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean in irrefutable legal, historical, political and economic arguments.

With ever greater dedication and perseverance, my country sought contact and direct negotiations with Chile in order to find within dialogue a friendly solution that would meet the needs of both countries. In the twentieth century alone, we began at least five bilateral negotiations. Unfortunately, none were successful, for reasons which I do not have to point out now. I mention them only to show that this path has been explored with the support of countries friendly to Chile and Bolivia, and that Chile formally agreed to grant Bolivia a sovereign outlet to the Pacific Ocean and that route is known.

Now, at the threshold of a new century, Bolivia has decided to insist on calling for direct dialogue, a dialogue which would encompass all the themes in our relations with Chile. I trust that very soon we will define, with Chancellor Valdés, the terms of that dialogue, which, in my opinion, should encompass the complete range of our relations and identify ways for the economic, cultural and political cooperation which will unite our nations when

Bolivia recovers its maritime attribute. The experience of the past does not discourage us. New times, new men, new realities must bring along with them new solutions. That is our hope.

The United Nations system, one of the most important creations of the century, is at the threshold of a new millennium and is subjected to many tensions. Its function as a channel for official development assistance has remained constrained by the privatization of financing and technology groups which go from advanced countries to emerging markets.

Its role as a forum for negotiation and dialogue between the North and the South and between developed countries and developing countries is being disregarded for a new and different structure which revolves around essentially technical mechanisms, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, in which negotiations are different from what they were in the past. Its very role as a collective security system sometimes seems at times eclipsed by the unilateral action of countries or groups of countries intent on making their agenda prevail over the world mechanism.

I mention these changes here simply as an argument in support of the need to think about the reform of the system, as a process of creating it anew, and not simply an attempt to stop the clock because of a nostalgic vision. I am convinced that this is the view of the statesmen who represent the United Nations and whose patient yet persevering work will bear fruit sooner rather than later.

Bolivia, of course, as always, is ready to make its firm contribution.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Malawi, His Excellency The Honourable Brown Mpinganjira.

Mr. Mpinganjira (Malawi): The President of the General Assembly has assumed the mantle of leadership at a critical time, as we are about to enter the new millennium. We are about to leave a century which has revealed positive and negative aspects of the human experience. On the negative side, the century has been characterized by colonialism, armed conflict, racism and racial discrimination, apartheid, dictatorship, the Holocaust, genocide, ethnic cleansing, religious intolerance and other forms of evil. In their wake many people, particularly women and children, have lost their lives and have been maimed, traumatized, dehumanized, displaced and forced to seek refuge. Poverty and underdevelopment have wreaked havoc.

On the other hand, humankind has demonstrated a sense of magnanimity in overcoming suffering and despair. We have made very strong efforts to wipe out slavery, colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid. We have striven, through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, to promote the togetherness of humankind and improve the well-being of all. We realize, however, that there is a lot more that can and must be done.

As this century comes to a close, Mr. Gurirab's leadership as President of the General Assembly, and his country, Namibia, represent a beacon of hope for the future. His qualities as an outstanding diplomat, freedom fighter and consensus-builder are all well known to us. My delegation wishes him well as he discharges his heavy responsibilities and leads this esteemed Organization into the new millennium.

In today's globalized world, the challenges are many and the opportunities are manifold. With the same spirit that has enabled us to surmount hurdles in the past, together we can make the twenty-first century a century for the prosperity of all. The groundwork, the foundation for all this, exists. To give credit where it is due, despite many weaknesses, humankind has never been wanting in ideas. The standard-setting strides and intellectual innovations of this century, particularly since the formation of the United Nations, could have been more appreciated if only an extra effort had been exerted towards implementation. Indeed, the twenty-first century should focus on the implementation and concretization of the ideas that have made this century worthwhile.

The consolidation of human rights, good governance and human development seems to my delegation a useful point of departure. The country that I represent was for a long time under a dictatorship. The people of Malawi suffered and know what it means to be deprived of freedom. They are well aware of the impact that denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms has on governance and development. To us the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are not optional, but essential prerequisites for the well-being of humankind.

Human rights are universal and indivisible. They are inalienable. When the people of Malawi went to the polls in June this year, in the second democratic elections, we

confirmed our desire to strengthen further the democratization processes that we started in 1994. The entrenchment of democracy in Malawi has given our people an opportunity to foster unity and common understanding. We now have an environment conducive to exploiting our full potential and maximizing our contributions to the developmental efforts that the Government is pursuing. We wish for all people of the world, regardless of their origin, the same opportunity to enjoy the rights and freedoms that Malawians are proud to enjoy today.

Unfortunately, the situation globally does not give cause for optimism, and there is no room for complacency. Inasmuch as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set forth the yardstick of common achievement and has given rise to numerous subject-specific binding instruments, every effort should be made to assure their effective implementation. The rights of women, children and the disadvantaged, especially, must be given their fullest practical meaning.

As we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, we should reaffirm our commitment to take all practical measures to eliminate discrimination against women and review all practices that impede the mainstreaming of gender in all our developmental endeavours. Malawi welcomes and looks forward to the review conference of the Beijing Platform for Action next year. It is our belief that gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century are achievable.

Almost 10 years ago, world leaders assembled in this very Hall for the World Summit for Children. They made groundbreaking commitments to reach certain goals by the year 2000. The State of the World's Children 1999 report, however, indicates that the benchmarks set are far from being realized. Meeting the commitments of the 1990 Summit remains one of the challenges that we all face at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The continued recruitment and use of children as soldiers in most of today's conflicts is a major source of worry. The use of children as child labourers and in prostitution is also cause for serious concern. We remain convinced that investing in children means a secure future for us all.

Many other conferences have also taken place — particularly during this last decade — including those in Paris, Vienna, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Cairo and Copenhagen. In all these conferences, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms has been a recurrent and cross-cutting theme. Malawi fully supports the outcome of these conferences.

The time has come to make good the pledges that we made: personal liberties for all, particularly women and children; social development, especially for the least developed countries; protection of the environment; provision of food and shelter; jobs and income; education for all; and secure health, including reproductive rights, remain the core of human security. Indeed, these conferences have brought to the fore the interlinkages between the protection of human rights and the questions of good governance and development. Quite often, they seem to give rise to conflicting interests; we aspire to a rights-based approach to development, yet the facts are stark: how can our countries, particularly those with fragile economies such as our own, ensure strong public policies aimed at promoting food security, for example, when the very interventions intended to provide incentives for local production and distribution are put into question by our efforts to spur economic growth? How do we give priority to public expenditures for basic social services such as education, health and water when these are the first to be cut in an effort to meet structural adjustment conditionalities and the demands of debt servicing?

The challenge for us all is to minimize conflict and aim to strike an appropriate balance to ensure proper services that are human-rights compliant. Malawi supports the statement in the United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report* 1999, to the effect that national and global governance must be reinvented with human development and equity at their core. With our concerted efforts, this is achievable. My delegation particularly welcomes the positive developments that are taking place in our beloved continent, Africa. As democracy blossoms, we are increasingly witnessing efforts to harness progress in human development: Africa's renaissance is no longer a slogan, but a realistic achievement for the twenty-first century.

In Malawi, we remain committed to strengthening good governance based on the principles of accountability and transparency. Attention is also given to addressing corruption and strengthening public sector administration, in particular enhancing local participation in decision-

making processes. We will continue to carry out the necessary economic and fiscal reforms.

Despite unpalatable structural adjustment conditionalities and the impact of debt servicing, the Government continues to give top priority to the provision of basic social services, particularly in education, health, water supply, community development and road infrastructure. The Poverty Alleviation Programme and the Malawi Social Action Fund seek to empower the populace so that they can contribute more positively to development. Free primary education for all was introduced by the Government to ensure that Malawian children, who hold the future of the country in their hands, are given equal opportunities to grow into productive and responsible adults.

In the health and water sectors, true to the slogan "healthy people make a healthy nation", the Government is establishing more health centres in many parts of rural Malawi: the Bakili Muluzi health initiative, which aims to bring medical services right to the people, was introduced recently. We are also making remarkable progress in bringing clean and safe water to all rural areas.

In order to respond fully to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country, the Government, in close cooperation with civil society, has embarked on highly publicized awareness campaigns which we hope will contribute to changing behavioural patterns. We appeal for more resources: additional funding for research is indeed imperative. Meanwhile, for those already afflicted, it is important for the drugs that are available now to be made more affordable for the majority of our poor.

In agriculture, the mainstay of Malawi, the priority is to achieve food self-sufficiency. In this connection, we have embarked on irrigation programmes to supplement rain-fed agricultural production.

The Malawian examples are typical of the important steps that Africa is taking, which are positive signs of renewal. Africa, however, needs the world in the same way that the world needs Africa. Africa needs a partnership, one that is shared and mutually beneficial -- a genuine partnership. We realize that the primary responsibility for African development rests with African countries themselves. It is nevertheless important for African countries to be given meaningful assistance to enable them to embark on sound economic development. The Cairo Agenda for Action adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1995 is an important blueprint for African economic development: it sets out the broad priority areas requiring specific attention. Numerous other initiatives have highlighted the need to help the development of Africa. The challenge as we approach the twenty-first century should and must be to harmonize these initiatives with a view to adopting action-oriented measures for urgent implementation.

Whatever interventions are made, it has become increasingly clear that a meaningful transformation of African economies, even after introducing all the necessary domestic, economic and market reforms, cannot be sustained without complementary improvements in trade flows, improvements in financial resource flows — whether through increased official development assistance, debt relief or forgiveness, or foreign direct investment — and support for regional cooperation. All this must be done in a conducive, secure and predictable environment. Indeed, in the globalized economy of today what happens in one part of the globe has ripple effects and impacts developments elsewhere: the Asian financial crisis and the recent sale of gold are clear examples of this phenomenon.

We must act now if we are to avert a human catastrophe in the near future. In particular, my delegation wishes to single out the imperative need for the international community to address the problem of debt. Although encouraged by the positive responses in recent months, we renew the appeal for debt forgiveness which we made in this Hall several years ago. The current ratio of external debt to gross national product, 89 per cent for my country, is causing enormous economic stress and hardship, particularly for women and children. The situation does not augur well for the future, and is having adverse effects on the Government's poverty eradication policy; also, the gains we have made politically through democratization and good governance will become meaningless without economic development.

Malawi is not alone in this predicament. Many other countries find themselves in similar conditions, where poverty is rampant and the disparities between the haves and the have-nots are widening.

One of the major issues on which people look up to the United Nations is because of its concern for national identity. It is in this spirit that Malawi reiterates its conviction that the question of participation by the Republic of China on Taiwan in the activities of the United Nations deserves consideration on the basis of respect for the principle of universality and the sovereign

equality of States. The Republic of China, a democratic country of over 21 million people, is a reality and cannot be ignored. It cannot be wished away. Malawi believes that readmission of the Republic of China to the United Nations and to all its specialized agencies would be an important factor for peace, stability and international cooperation.

No progress towards improved human development can be sustained without peace and stability. As we commemorate the centennial of the first Peace Conference at The Hague, my delegation wishes to reiterate the importance that it attaches to the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. In this connection, Malawi also welcomes the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court last year. We have already signed the Statute, and steps are under way to assure ratification without delay. We are confident that as the next century nears, the early entry into force of the Rome Statute will fortify our resolve to bring an end to impunity.

Much as the Rome Statute will go a long way in bringing to book those perpetrators of heinous crimes, it is incumbent upon us all to rid the earth of all weapons of mass destruction. The Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) next year affords us an opportunity to make greater strides in the area of nuclear disarmament. It is worth recalling the words of Albert Einstein: "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding." Indeed, peace cannot be sustained by a threat of use of force. So long as the spectre of a nuclear war exists, the world will never be at peace with itself. We urge all countries to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and those countries that have nuclear weapons to destroy them in order to finally realize general and complete disarmament and a nuclear-weapon-free world.

We also appeal to those countries that have not yet done so to become party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the anti-personnel landmines Convention. We equally enjoin current efforts to address the proliferation of small arms. In our region, this problem has assumed frightening proportions, as robberies and thefts have become more and more violent. Urgent action needs to be taken to tackle this problem resolutely. In particular, Malawi supports a moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons. We must also look for ways of stopping their flow. This Organization should prevail upon the manufacturers of these weapons to stop the illegal export of their deadly merchandise to Africa. Let them stop manufacturing and exporting these weapons to Africa. That is the bottom line. There is no point in inviting us to conferences when, under cover of darkness, the manufacturers of those small arms continue exporting them to Africa.

The biggest threat to international peace and security remains humankind. As events in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia, Rwanda, Guinea-Bissau, the Middle East, the Korean peninsula and many other parts of the globe, including, most recently, East Timor, have shown, human beings continue to be the main centre of activity where armed conflict, tensions and the quest for power exist.

As the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reminds us, "wars begin in the minds of men". Only human beings can control their own destiny. Just as those who sat at The Hague Conference 100 years ago were, we are capable of renouncing violence and of resolving all disputes through peaceful means. In this regard, we would like to welcome the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit declaration that the year 2000 will be a year of peace, security and solidarity in Africa. We remain optimistic that the Israelis and the Palestinians; the people of Western Sahara and East Timor; our brothers and sisters in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Somalia; and many others whose rights and liberties remain unprotected will finally find peace. We can together provide a conducive atmosphere for the provision of all other basic needs that have an impact on peace and security.

In the view of my delegation, the United Nations remains a singular Organization that is capable of consolidating peace and promoting sustainable human development. The relevance of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security has become even more pronounced in recent years. My delegation wishes to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for providing leadership and a renewed sense of mission to the Organization. Reform of the Organization systemwide and of its funds, programmes and specialized agencies has rekindled hopes for a secure world. Effective collaboration by all United Nations bodies, each focusing on areas of expertise, is a sure way of reaching our goals and realizing our aspirations.

The task that remains is to make the United Nations more responsive to the responsibilities ahead — the challenges of the twenty-first century. For six years now we have been talking about reform of the Security Council, but without any breakthrough. It is imperative that the Security Council be made more democratic, transparent and accountable. Representation of developing countries in the permanent category is necessary in order to ensure the continued legitimacy of, and respect for, the Council's decisions. The United Nations must be properly resourced in order for it to carry out adequately its noble activities.

Similarly, the United Nations cannot remain aloof to the requirements of civil society. Increased cooperation between the Organization and civil society, including the private sector, can only make the Organization stronger. The important role played in particular by non-governmental organizations in the adoption of the Rome Statute and the anti-personnel landmines Convention must be acknowledged and ways explored to enhance it. We believe that increased contacts between the Organization and civil society will ensure the continued relevance of the Organization in the twenty-first century.

As the Organization prepares for the Millennium Assembly next year under your leadership, the role of civil society in the consolidation of human rights, good governance and human development might be a subject that should be given in-depth consideration within the context of the overall theme of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

Finally, Malawi would like to congratulate the three new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. We welcome them to the United Nations family.

The President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas, Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): The Bahamas shares the confidence that the international community has placed in you, Sir, as the envoy of Namibia and of the continent of Africa to preside over this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the last in this twentieth century. My delegation congratulates you and pledges its full support as you guide our deliberations at this critical juncture.

My delegation's congratulations are also extended to Mr. Didier Opertti, who represented our Latin American and Caribbean region as President of the fifty-third session.

My delegation wishes to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his leadership of this highly complex Organization on which rest the hopes and aspirations of the world's peoples and which is our best prospect for a stable world.

I am pleased on this occasion to warmly welcome the Kingdom of Tonga, the Republic of Kiribati and the Republic of Nauru, the United Nations newest Member States, to this community of nations. These countries add to the growing number of small island developing States in the United Nations and underscore the need for the Organization to increase its efforts in support of this important constituency.

The United Nations was created with a mandate to work collectively for a better world, and since its inception it has contributed to positive developments in the global arena. However, significant challenges persist. The agenda of the fifty-fourth session shows that even as some progress has been made, we will continue at this session to grapple with many of the thorny issues that have preoccupied the international community over the decades. At the same time, new challenges will have to be addressed.

Recent events in Europe and elsewhere in the world, spawned by internal conflict, have raised questions as to whether States fractured by ethnic, religious and other strife could build national identities to span these divides. At the same time, they remind us that the greatest care must be taken in making exceptions to the general principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States. The Bahamas believes that this principle remains an important safeguard for international peace and security.

The Bahamas accepts that internal conflicts create situations in which the Security Council should act, in accordance with the Charter. However, we believe that whenever the United Nations responds to internal conflicts and threats to regional stability, it must do so with one and the same degree of urgency, with adequate resources and with consistency. It is with these considerations in mind that the Bahamas supports United Nations efforts to bring peace and stability to areas of conflict in all regions of the world.

Recent United Nations peace initiatives give us hope that long-standing and seemingly intractable problems may have solutions. Indeed, the Bahamas is encouraged by developments in the Middle East, particularly the

signing this month of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. We see these developments as having the potential to end decades of conflict in that troubled region. If enlightened self-interest were to prevail in long-standing conflicts elsewhere in Africa, Asia and Latin America, they too could be resolved. Global attention could then be turned towards development and human betterment, as envisaged in the Charter.

Globalization and trade liberalization are gaining currency as means of promoting accelerated development and opening opportunities to bridge the gap between rich and poor. However, concerns are being expressed that the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its dispute settlement mechanisms put the interests of the strong ahead of the interests of the weak. Indeed, the anticipated benefits of free trade give little comfort to Caribbean States and farmers dependent as they are on bananas for their foreign exchange earnings and their very livelihood. Where preferential treatment is removed before Caribbean countries can restructure their economies, severe hardship results. We therefore believe that all concerned must make an effort to find a solution to the banana problem.

We see the new round of WTO negotiations scheduled to begin in Seattle in November as an invaluable opportunity for developing countries to have their concerns incorporated into the discussions. The Bahamas is currently giving consideration to acquiring observer status in the WTO. It fully intends to follow the multilateral negotiating process and to bring its concerns to the table, particularly in the areas of trade in services and differential treatment for small economies.

Growth in the economy of the Bahamas is in part attributable to the services it offers as an offshore financial centre. The Bahamas is concerned about the action taken within the international community to inhibit or prevent the use of offshore centres and to label them, impertinently, as "harmful" tax jurisdictions. Furthermore, there is a tendency to treat all offshore jurisdictions as a homogenous group, which they are most definitely not.

The Bahamas had the opportunity to address the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on harmful tax practices in August this year in Paris. We emphasized there that strict regulations and appropriate legislation, specifically formulated to counter money laundering and other illegal activities, govern financial institutions in the Bahamas. The Bahamas is committed to working with all concerned to address these and related issues.

In May this year, it was reported to our Parliament that the economy of the Bahamas was experiencing a period of dynamism. In 1998, our economy grew some 3 per cent, the unemployment rate was 7.8 per cent and net foreign investment inflows amounted to $491 million. But on 14 September 1999, hurricane Floyd struck the Bahamas, and the entire archipelago felt its impact. Significant damage was done to the environment, infrastructure and property. The full implications for the economy of our country of the relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts have yet to be calculated.

What happened in the Bahamas underscores the continuing validity of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted in 1994. We cannot help but emphasize — as so many States did at the recently concluded twenty-second special session — how imperative it therefore remains for the Barbados Programme of Action to be implemented. It is in this context that we urge renewed commitment on the part of all to the search for consensus on the draft resolution on the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

Together with our Caribbean Community sister States, the Bahamas has made known our concern regarding the transhipment of nuclear and hazardous waste through the Caribbean Sea. Yet these shipments continue. We reiterate our wish to see these shipments stopped: they constitute the gravest risk to the fragility of our marine environment and our economies.

The significant number of reviews issued recently or expected in the coming months, of the outcomes of United Nations Conferences on small island developing States, population and development, social development and women, attest to the efforts of the United Nations to meet its economic and social obligations under the Charter. The Bahamas confidently expects that these reviews will all confirm that renewed political will and action are required to meet the goals we set, at a high level, in Barbados, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing.

Let me comment briefly on our continuing efforts to maintain the momentum for gender equality, a subject which will be taken up in the five-year Beijing review. Women worldwide continue to break through glass ceilings. In the Bahamas, for example, women have made

significant strides in Parliament, the judiciary, public service and business and service organizations. However, the Bahamas is cognizant that there are still serious challenges to women's equality. We are particularly concerned about the traffic in human beings, predominantly women and children. The Bahamas intends to continue its active support, both nationally and internationally, for efforts to help women realize their legal rights, attain economic empowerment and rise above poverty. It is our hope, therefore, that the Beijing review will result in strategies to further engage the international community in support of the world's women.

The Bahamas supports the growing consensus on human rights, which focuses on principles and values including democracy, good governance and the rule of law. We also believe that United Nations Member States should honour the human rights commitments they have made.

The Republic of Haiti is a fledgling democracy courageously facing significant political, economic and social challenges. These myriad challenges have resulted in a sustained influx of illegal immigration from Haiti into the Bahamas. Together with other illegal immigration, particularly from other countries in the Caribbean region, illegal Haitian immigration continues to be a burden to the socio-economic structures of the Bahamas. We therefore have a vested interest in the stabilization of Haiti's democratic institutions and economy. The Bahamas participated in a Caribbean Community mission to Haiti in July of this year; that mission reviewed with the Haitian Government its preparedness for elections. In so doing, we signalled our support for the process of free and fair elections in Haiti. We also fully support the efforts of the Economic and Social Council and of the General Assembly for Haiti's reconstruction and for the strengthening and furtherance of its democracy.

Last year, at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, on the world drug problem, the international community adopted a new and detailed programme of measures to enhance the effectiveness of national, regional and international drug control activities. Member States must now implement the programme, particularly by meeting the targets set in the special session's concluding documents. For the United Nations International Drug Control Programme to carry out its mandate, adequate resources must be allocated to it.

Drug trafficking into and through the Bahamas is a major threat to our socio-economic development. A significant proportion of the national budget continues to be spent on drug law enforcement. I wish to emphasize that even though we do so at the expense of vital national programmes, the Bahamas will not relent in its efforts to overcome the serious challenges posed by drug trafficking and related criminality. We are particularly concerned about the traffic in illicit firearms, which appears to be working in tandem with the drug trade. Further, with the increase in firearms comes an increase in violent crime committed with those firearms. We continue to urge greater efforts to control the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in firearms, including the ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions.

The failure to achieve general and complete disarmament means that serious threats to international peace and security persist. The production and stockpiling of chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction exacerbate this situation. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, to which the Bahamas is a party, has been a key success in recent disarmament initiatives. The Convention demonstrates what can be achieved when there is unity of purpose in the field of disarmament.

In a constantly changing global environment, United Nations reform must continue to be a priority to ensure that the Organization remains relevant to the role envisaged for it under the Charter. Negotiations on the multifaceted objective of Security Council reform have moved at a frustratingly slow pace. It is clear that the Council must be reformed, and that one of the main objectives must be its enlargement. This has the support of the Bahamas. However, in determining criteria for expanded membership of the Council, consideration must be given to a mechanism for all Members to enjoy the privilege of serving thereon.

The Bahamas welcomes the General Assembly's decision to convene a millennium summit at the beginning of the Millennium Assembly. We share the view that the summit should not be just a commemoration, but should also be substantive. The Bahamas wishes to reflect briefly on what the summit's approach might include. We see the summit not as a forum for a restatement of lofty ideals or of the practical initiatives that were the outcomes of past international conferences. The millennium summit must be used as a catalyst that would build, especially, on the outcomes of those conferences to produce a revitalized international agenda for the twenty-first century. That agenda should

take into account the accomplishments of the United Nations system as a whole in the areas of economic and social development as well as peace and security, and it should be realistic. From this last perspective, it is the continued position of the Bahamas that the question of refugees, for example, should not continue to be divorced from the broader question of illegal migration.

Under the revitalized agenda, the United Nations would have improved partnerships with other regional and international organizations. Such partnerships with organizations including the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States and the Caribbean Community would further the coordination of solutions to problems of a global nature.

The United Nations cannot do what we ask of it unless it is provided with the necessary resources. The common values we share, and our determination to find solutions to the world's problems, should give us the political will to build on what the United Nations has accomplished to date. Thus, the Organization must be assured of funding on a reliable, predictable and timely basis to carry out the mandates entrusted to it by its Member States.

The broad range of problems and issues on the United Nations agenda cannot be solved without investment in multilateralism and partnerships. It is our responsibility to make the United Nations a highly effective organization fully capable of responding to the security, political, economic and social challenges of the twenty-first century. The Bahamas pledges its full commitment to play its part in United Nations efforts to secure a better future for all.

The President: I call next on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Haiti, His Excellency Mr. Fritz Longchamp.

Mr. Longchamp (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): The Republic of Haiti finds it a source of genuine satisfaction that the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly is being presided over by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, a man for whom we have a great deal of admiration. With positive results, he has competently and responsibly served his country, Namibia, which is quite rightly considered one of the symbols of the success of our Organization. We take this opportunity to wish him every success in the tremendous and noble task he has undertaken.

We pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, who so effectively conducted the proceedings of the fifty-third session.

We also take this opportunity to convey our most sincere greetings to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, at a time when our world is facing many challenges, has known how to use his intelligence and the wisdom of his great experience to help the community of nations face up to the inevitable changes of the twenty-first century.

We also welcome, with great satisfaction, the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tanga as full-fledged Members of our Organization. They will strengthen the universal nature of the Organization and enrich its diversity of points of view.

We take the floor this 1 October, one day after the anniversary of the bloody *coup d'état* of 1991, a genuine act of assassination of democracy and of the dream of an entire people. Without the determined action of the United Nations and its Members, contemplating this sad and deadly event would have been even more painful for the people of Haiti today. We would therefore like to express once again our gratitude to the international community for having ensured the restoration of democratic constitutional order in Haiti.

Since that restoration of democracy, the Government and the people of Haiti, helped by the international community, have worked zealously to ensure an environment favourable to the blossoming of democracy and economic progress. This effort has not yet yielded the results we had hoped for, because over the last five years the Republic of Haiti has had to confront problems arising from the complexity of its situation. But through the will of our people and its Government, the Haitian dream of democracy will become a reality.

Above all, the Government of the Republic is still convinced of the critical importance of the renewal of its institutions, in particular of the Parliament, most of whose members had their term of office expire on 11 January 1999. To this end, fair, honest, democratic elections will be organized in the next few months. The head of State, Mr. René Préval, has repeatedly and solemnly affirmed his determination to create the conditions to make it possible for the elections to be organized by the Provisional Electoral Council. Of course, as guarantor of the functioning of the institutions,

the President of the Republic has considered that the most important thing is the establishment of the physical conditions necessary for well-organized elections, rather than hasty elections the results of which might be called into question because of organizational shortcomings. For President Préval, the holding of the elections must lead to a solution to our crisis and not its perpetuation, or even the creation of yet another crisis.

In order to work to consolidate its achievements, the Government hopes that a consensus will be found to continue technical assistance for professionalizing the National Police, in strict compliance with Haitian law. The Government of the Republic wants to avoid any interruption of the effort to thoroughly reform the judicial system and to promote full respect for all dimensions of human rights.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is undoubtedly a highly symbolic moment. As the last session of this century, it ought to come up with a vision that would make our Organization an essential and efficient instrument for meeting the challenges that await us in the twenty-first century. We know the contours of this vision, as they were sketched after the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Rio Earth Summit. The sketch is filled in by the ideal of the peoples of the whole world, as expressed in our Charter: to save future generations from the scourge of war, to ensure respect for fundamental human rights, to promote social progress and to establish better conditions of living in greater freedom. Thus, our task at this fifty-fourth session should be to fully work out, by means of our discussions and the work of the various committees, the concept and ways of implementing this vision.

The fifty-fourth session will also be an opportunity for the United Nations to give deeper thought to its mission of ensuring international peace and security and of promoting economic and social development. In this regard, the Republic of Haiti is happy to note that the situation in East Timor is improving following the actions of the international community and its cooperation with the Indonesian authorities. We hope that the presence of the multinational peace force will help bring the country out of the chaos into which it has been plunged. We urge the Indonesian Government and its allies in East Timor to fully respect the decision of the ballot box and to take measures to ensure East Timor's peaceful transition to independence and democracy.

The Republic of Haiti also welcomes the end of the state of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Agreement signed in Lusaka, under the aegis of President Frederick Chiluba, between the protagonists in this conflict is clear evidence that Africa is in the process of providing itself with the means to become master of its diplomatic and geographical destiny.

The Republic of Haiti calls upon India and Pakistan to do everything possible to find a permanent solution to the Kashmir conflict and to put an end to their nuclear arms race, which is indeed a frightening process that diverts tremendous financial resources and brainpower to destruction when they could be put at the service of survival and development.

Once again the Haitian Government reiterates its condemnation of all forms of terrorist activities that might cause material and human damage. We reaffirm our faith in the fundamental rights of man and in the general principles of international law as the basis of norms that govern the relations among States.

In the face of the conflicts that threaten international peace and security, it is reassuring that the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Mr. Federico Mayor, has had the idea of promoting throughout the world the culture of peace, which is so vital to good relations within and between nations. The promotion of a genuine culture of peace is inseparable from the democratization of the international order. One of the fundamental aspects of this democratization lies in the solution to the question of equitable representation in the Security Council. It is time for this Assembly to reach a consensus on this subject of such crucial importance for the future of our Organization.

An equally important point for establishing a genuine culture of peace is the implementation of United Nations resolutions in the realm of international security. Many resolutions have not been implemented when their implementation would be decisive, not only in the context of North-South relations, but also in the context of the indispensable relationships to be developed between States, international institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Over the last two months, the Government and the people of Haiti have observed with sadness and helplessness the destruction wreaked and the terrible toll taken by the natural disasters that have struck Turkey,

Taiwan, Greece, the Bahamas and the United States. We wish to reiterate to the people of these countries that we share their pain and offer our heartfelt solidarity, having ourselves, unfortunately, experienced such disasters.

We take this opportunity to repeat that the Haitian Government is following attentively the evolution of relations between the two countries on the Taiwan Strait. Our Government notes with satisfaction that the two sides are undertaking measures to establish a climate of confidence, respect and prosperity, which will be of the utmost benefit to the peoples who live there.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the fight for the elimination of poverty remains one of the most noble tasks of the United Nations system, in order to establish, as we are bidden by our Charter, better living conditions for the human beings living on this earth.

President Gurirab recently echoed the feelings of the vast majority of developing countries when he noted that globalization might open the floodgates of competition in such a way that certain States would be wiped off the map. Therefore it is up to the United Nations and to each country to examine attentively the means of remedying the ill effects of globalization on the social and economic structures of every country — and particularly its effects on small developing countries. Certainly globalization has its positive side, bringing human communities closer together politically, socially and culturally. But it must not be used as a pretext for a standardization that might neutralize the diversity that is the very strength of humanity.

On the eve of the third millennium what should unite us more than ever, beyond our differences and often highly divergent interests, is the laying down of foundations to bring about the security of all and the elimination of poverty as the initial phase of a planetary process of true sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo, Mr. Joseph Kokou Koffigoh.

Mr. Koffigoh (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to join those who spoke before me in expressing my warmest congratulations to the President on his election to lead this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This choice reflects the great esteem in which the international community holds his country, Namibia, as well as being a tribute to his past as a freedom fighter and to his qualities as a statesman. I assure him of the wholehearted support of my delegation as he carries out his duties.

I would also like to extend my most sincere congratulations to President Gurirab's predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, for the skill with which he conducted the work of the fifty-third session of the Assembly.

To Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to express the utmost appreciation of the Government of Togo for the perspicacity and tenacity he has shown in seeking solutions to the many problems facing the Organization.

Finally, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to warmly congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission into this great family, the United Nations.

We have met once again this year to take stock of actions carried out in pursuit of our common objectives and to coordinate our views on what actions to take in order to address today's challenges. Given the current state of the world, we must acknowledge that, despite the significant progress that has been made, the world is still marked, unfortunately, by instability, raging wars and tensions that are most often due to widespread poverty and to the uneven distribution of resources, as well as to the legitimate aspiration of peoples for greater freedom, justice and well-being.

Indeed, at a time when mankind is getting ready to embark on the third millennium, our world offers one of the bleakest pictures in its history from an economic and social point of view. All kinds of problems linked to underdevelopment, poverty and inequalities between developed and disadvantaged countries — problems long denounced in this and other forums — have worsened in recent years as a result of the globalization of the economy. Although developed countries have benefited from this phenomenon, especially in the areas of trade and investment, developing countries are suffering the negative impact of globalization on their economies, which have already been rendered fragile by their unbearable debt burden, the plummeting of prices for raw materials and the steady decline in official development assistance.

As regards the external-debt problem in particular, we can never stress enough how the accumulation of this

debt hampers development efforts. The awareness of the extent of this problem and of its impact on development is such that the most industrialized countries and the Bretton Woods institutions and those of the United Nations system now acknowledge that most of the developing countries' debt can never be repaid. They also acknowledge quite openly that the debt burden is the major obstacle to the development of poor countries and that the mechanisms that have been established to resolve the debt crisis have not been very effective.

Within this context we can only welcome the commitment of the G-8 summit, held last June in Cologne, to cancel a portion of the debt of world's poorest countries. My delegation encourages the international community to continue to take bold steps aimed at resolving the debt problem in an effective and lasting manner. These steps might include the cancellation of all of the bilateral debt of the poorest countries, a significant reduction of the debt burden of middle-income and low-income countries, and increasing the flexibility of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative so as to make its benefits more generally available. However, we should point out that the implementation of such measures should not be carried out to the detriment of official development assistance, which, unfortunately, continues to decline.

As regards trade, it is generally acknowledged that the expansion of international trade is a true engine for growth and development. We would like to see the international community take appropriate measures to integrate developing countries into the international-trade regime, through increasing access for their exports to the markets of developed countries, by supporting the diversification and strengthening of developing countries' production capacities, and by improving terms of trade.

We sincerely hope that the forthcoming negotiations at the World Trade Organization, the tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries will take into account the interests of the weakest partners.

In recent years, many initiatives have been taken on the bilateral and multilateral levels to try to address the challenges faced by the African continent. In this respect, I would cite the United States initiative for a Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa and the Tokyo International Conferences on African Development. While this may be satisfying, there is still reason, in the name of efficiency, to call for some degree of coordination between these initiatives and those of the United Nations system.

Efforts to promote development and eradicate poverty in Africa cannot be dissociated from our daily struggle to safeguard peace and security. For our countries again this year, preserving and consolidating a climate of peace and stability have been the major imperative, given the many real dangers.

Thus, the Government of Togo, traditionally inclined to search for peace and stability, has spared no effort to try to reconcile points of view whenever discord arises, convinced that dialogue and cooperation should be emphasized in the settlement of disputes and that any conflict that may arise in any country of a subregion represents a tragedy for the entire subregion, and perhaps Africa as a whole.

Inspired by the spirit of subregional solidarity that, under the President of our Republic, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadéma, current Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we have carried out actions and taken appropriate initiatives to find negotiated solutions to the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, the conflict in Sierra Leone and the border dispute between Guinea and Liberia.

Following the crisis that erupted in Guinea-Bissau in June 1998, the efforts of the ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries led to the signing of a ceasefire and a peace Agreement in November 1998. The subsequent deployment of an ECOWAS Monitoring Group contingent with woefully inadequate means did not allow us effectively to implement the provisions of the Abuja Agreement and the Lomé Protocol, nor did it entirely allay tensions. Despite the brutal upheaval of the peace process on 7 May 1999, the Security Council ratified the Secretary-General's proposal to maintain the United Nations office in Guinea-Bissau with a new mandate. We hope that the Organization and the international community will continue to provide the necessary assistance to the people of Guinea-Bissau, who so desperately need it. We welcome the commitments undertaken that will ensure respect for the elections of November 1997. We expect that tranquility and security will return to Guinea-Bissau.

In Sierra Leone, thanks to the initiative and determination of the ECOWAS heads of State and to the support of the international community, the Government

of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front signed, in our capital city of Lomé on 7 July 1999, a Peace Agreement whose implementation will, we hope, allow the people of Sierra Leone to embark decisively on the path of national reconciliation, stability and reconstruction. Thus, as I pointed out yesterday before the Security Council in the context of the open debate on the situation in Africa, the restoration is closely linked to the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement.

That is why I am pleased by the Secretary-General's proposal in his latest report on Sierra Leone to create a United Nations force of 6,000 in that country, in keeping with this Agreement. I am convinced that the Security Council, which has already begun to consider the matter, will authorize as soon as possible the deployment of that force, which, in compliance with its mandate, will help the Government of Sierra Leone to implement the stalled disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

We also wish particularly to thank the Government of the United Kingdom, which chairs the international contact group on Sierra Leone; the international organizations and humanitarian agencies; and all those who have variously contributed to restoring peace in that country. I recall the fine spirit of solidarity that was manifest during the negotiations on the Lomé Peace Agreement, which allowed the representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, as well as the permanent representatives of the United Nations and the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Sierra Leone to pool their efforts around the seven-member ECOWAS contact group, which worked tirelessly day and night for success in Sierra Leone. That is why we feel that the decision to embark as soon as possible on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme with the dispatch of 6,000 United Nations blue helmets would put an end to this war.

As for Liberia, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of ECOWAS met on 26 August 1999 in Lomé to study the destabilization of that brotherly country. My delegation makes an urgent appeal to the parties involved to respect the relevant provisions of the ECOWAS Treaty and the non-aggression protocol signed in Lagos on 22 April 1998 in order to allow the immediate restoration of a climate of peace, security and confidence in the subregion. In this respect, we were pleased by the recent signing in Abuja, on 16 September, of the understanding between the heads of State of Guinea and Liberia during the ECOWAS mini-summit, held in the capital of Nigeria. We also appeal to the international community to provide the necessary support to countries of the subregion that have borne the burden of refugees, Guinea-Bissau in particular, so that they may address that problem.

Elsewhere, the perpetuation of armed conflicts, with their humanitarian consequences of all kinds, deeply concerns my delegation. In this respect, we welcome the signing in Lusaka on 12 July of the Ceasefire Agreement between the main parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ardently call for a stronger commitment of the Security Council to assist the Southern African Development Community countries.

In Angola, we hope that the joint efforts of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity will allow the people of that country to achieve reconciliation and will encourage the restoration of peace and stability in that country. In any case, Togo is determined to apply the decisions of our United Nations with respect to the steps taken against the belligerent parties in Angola.

As to the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, my delegation sincerely hopes that these two brotherly countries will truly embark on the path towards a peaceful solution of their dispute.

It is comforting to note that real progress has been made with regard to the crisis stemming from the Lockerbie affair after many years of procrastination which penalized the fraternal people of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. The Government of Togo believes that in placing the two Lockerbie bombing suspects at the disposal of the United Nations, Libya has met its obligations under Security Council resolutions and that the Security Council must immediately lift the sanctions imposed on that country. This will contribute to ending the suffering of our Libyan brothers, which has lasted too long.

With regard to the Middle East, we reaffirm our strong conviction that an era of lasting peace, stability and security for all can come about only through the continuation of the peace process and the most resolute political will on all sides, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of "land for peace". In this context, the Government of Togo welcomes developments in that region, through steps recently taken by President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. We urge the

parties concerned to continue to work tirelessly to find ways and means to allow the harmonious continuation of the peace process.

One of the most important events that will have most deeply marked this fading century is undeniably the end of the cold war. Among other things, it resulted in averting the spectre of a nuclear holocaust; at least, we hope so.

Deeply attached to the principle of general and complete disarmament under effective international control, Togo is still concerned about nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction. This is why we appeal for continued efforts to put an end to the proliferation of nuclear arms and the threats they entail.

The same applies to proliferation of and illicit trafficking in light weapons and small arms in Africa. My country welcomes United Nations initiatives to curtail and contain this phenomenon, and hopes that the international conference decided upon by the General Assembly in resolution 53/77 E of 4 December 1998, and scheduled to take place in Geneva in 2001, will make it possible to find effective solutions to this problem.

I would also like to stress the role played in this context by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, which organized in Lomé, from 2 to 4 August 1999, a workshop on illicit trafficking in light weapons. I am pleased to take this opportunity to pay a well deserved tribute to the Secretary-General of our Organization, who has just provided this Centre with a Director, whose main task it is to revitalize its activities and mobilize the necessary funds to finance its operational expenses. Because of its important role in implementing the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development, as well as in the destruction of arms collected during the peace process in Liberia, we feel that support for its work is urgently needed. In this connection, we thank the Italian, Japanese, Norwegian and Swedish Governments for their generous voluntary contributions and reiterate our appeal to the international community to provide financial and logistical support.

I turn to the functioning of our Organization. Here I stress the fundamental role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security. My delegation reaffirms its support for all reforms to strengthen the effectiveness of the Council and provide representation for Africa, in the form of a permanent Member, in keeping with the will of the heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity.

Throughout its long history, my country has never strayed from the purposes of our Organization. We have often expressed and shown our dedication to the ideals of peace and justice, as well as the principles of democracy and the protection of human rights. Going beyond the social and political crises that we have known in recent years, the people of Togo are resolutely engaged in a new process of national understanding and harmony, something I wish to emphasize. On 19 July 1999, on the initiative of General Eyadema, President of the Republic, an internal dialogue bringing together all of the political actors of the country was organized following preliminary meetings held at Paris and Lomé between March and June 1999.

The opportunity was given to representatives of the presidential leadership and of the Togolese opposition to freely express themselves on the major issues of political life in our country, under the arbitration of international facilitators. In this regard, I would like to renew our deepest gratitude to France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the European Union and the International Organization of La Francophonie for the important role they played during these negotiations, which led to the signing of a framework agreement on 29 July 1999. For the implementation of the agreement, the Government has shown itself ready to make all necessary concessions that are in the national interest, it being understood that national reconciliation is vital to the continuation of the process of democratization and the consolidation of the rule of law in Togo, as elsewhere.

We are sure that reason and the national interest will prevail, so that the hopes of the people of Togo and the international community are not disappointed.

The Government regards the signing of the agreement as an important step in our resolute march towards building a democratic society and bringing about development. We therefore solemnly appeal to the international community to resume effective cooperation with Togo, in order to allow its population to enjoy the fruits of democratization. Poverty is the enemy of democracy.

The complexity of the issues and the many challenges to be taken up at the dawn of the third millennium call for a strengthening of international cooperation and, above all, greater solidarity with Africa. No nation, no country, whatever its resources and abilities, can tackle these challenges alone. Cooperation between the peoples of the United Nations is vital to us.

We must therefore act together, consolidating our solidarity within the framework of our Organization, which, after half a century of existence, has proved that it is an irreplaceable tool at the service of mankind.

Togo, which once again proclaims its faith in the United Nations, would encourage it to relentlessly pursue in the century to come the achievement of its Charter purposes.

May this session strengthen us in our common struggle to consolidate peace, justice, freedom and progress in the world and foster more understanding between nations. Togo is ready to contribute to this effort.

The Acting President (*spoke in English*): I call on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Grenada, His Excellency The Hon. Mark Isaac.

Mr. Isaac (Grenada): My delegation is delighted to congratulate the President on his election. My delegation's hearty congratulations are made even warmer as he has the privilege and the honour to take the fifty-fourth session, as President of the General Assembly, from the twentieth into the twenty-first century. A similar unique place in history will not be observed for another hundred years. We are confident, in view of his past heroic leadership of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and now as the Foreign Minister of Namibia, he will conduct our deliberations with vision and dynamism.

My delegation also wishes to express our grateful appreciation to Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay for his skilful and productive conduct of the proceedings of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

My delegation welcomes to the family of nations the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga and offers hearty congratulations.

As the curtain makes its slow descent upon the twentieth century, bringing it to its inevitable close, there is a prevailing mood of reflection and anticipation. Rightly so, as a connection between past, present and future is being made, for we cannot appreciate the present without knowledge of the past if we hope to ensure the future. And indeed, historically speaking, the past is never past, for what is past is prologue.

In retrospect, for some developing countries the period of the 1980s was considered a lost decade because of the heavy burden of debt servicing, falling commodity prices, negative economic growth, unemployment and structural adjustment. In the 1990s, the catchwords seemed to be "sustainable development", "environmentally friendly", "good governance", "globalization", and "poverty alleviation". These phrases seem to be the legacy of the cluster of United Nations summits of the 1990s: the Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, on Human Rights in 1993, on Small Island Developing States in 1994, on Population and Development in 1994, on Social Development in 1995, on Women in 1995, on Human Settlements in 1996 and on Food Security in 1996. In all these high-level meetings, the centrality of the human person in sustainable social, economic, and cultural development was emphasized.

Grenada believes that the concept of sustainable development is shared responsibility on the part of developed and developing countries. Its global character must be recognized so that there can be more sharing of knowledge, ideas, information and resources. Consequently, the region from which I come, the Caribbean, strongly urges our more developed partners urgently to make available new and additional sources of funding and technological transfer to enable us to comply with the obligations the international Conventions demand of us. In short, the concepts of the global village and globalization should be premised on giving, caring and sharing.

Sustainable development is not possible without respect for the whole range of human rights — economic, social, cultural, civil and political. Indeed, human rights are meaningless in an environment of poverty and deprivation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, has said, aptly, that perhaps the largest scale of human rights violations today is the fact that one fifth of humanity lives in absolute poverty. World Bank estimates reveal that over 35 per cent of people in the Caribbean basin live below the poverty line. This situation threatens the very existence of civil societies there.

Moreover, the plight of certain small Caribbean States is further compounded by the World Trade Organization's inhumane rulings over the European Union banana regime. We are still baffled over the attitude of our traditional ally and certain friendly Latin American countries over the modified version of the banana regime. We are hopeful, though, that a satisfactory compromise will be arrived at soon. If so, the economies of the small, banana-producing countries

would be saved from the shocks of a banana industry become non-existent.

I stress that there is an urgent need to unite our efforts in a common framework to alleviate the problems associated with critical poverty in order to restore some form of human dignity in our countries.

To the observer with no inside knowledge of the working of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the series of meetings to review what has already been reviewed, and perhaps in some cases already implemented, seem as complex as quantum physics and exercises in repetitive and confusing rhetoric. Nevertheless, since the conceptual and structural framework of sustainable development is shared responsibility, my delegation is hopeful that the recently-ended special session to review the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States has given some impetus to the creation of this global partnership we all desire. We are equally hopeful that the project proposals submitted by Grenada will be favourably considered and appropriate funding made available to execute them.

The Caribbean Sea is a unique body of water bordering a large number of States, with overlapping exclusive economic zones, vulnerable to the elements of nature and also to man-made disasters. The Caribbean Sea is indisputably the lifeblood of the countries of the Caribbean Community — one half of whose population lives on the coastline, where 20 per cent of the regional gross domestic product is produced — and provides employment for more than 25 per cent of the labour force in tourism and the fishing industry. Sustainable management and development of the Caribbean Sea and its resources would benefit not only the Caribbean people but also the international community as a whole.

Moreover, recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area within the context of sustainable development would provide the jurisdictional authority necessary to control the passage of ships carrying toxic and hazardous wastes and chemical and radioactive materials in Caribbean waters. My delegation urges this special recognition of the Caribbean Sea for all of the reasons I have stated.

We are mindful that we do not own the Earth; we are simply holding it in trust for succeeding generations. We are admonished not to treat the land with contempt and remember that from it we came and to it we shall return.

Grenada is absolutely clear about its commitment to the principles of the United Nations and therefore reveres the ideals which informed those principles. Grenada thus places a premium on fairness and justice in the conduct of international affairs. It is in this context that the Government of Grenada wishes to request that a fresh look be taken at United Nations General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 1971, as a matter of simple justice and fairness to the people of the Republic of China. This humanitarian-minded and democratically inclined country has used its hard-earned resources to help developing countries to help themselves, by providing training, expertise and capital for developmental projects and other forms of technical assistance in several critical areas. The noble efforts of the Republic of China reminds one of the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius, and his thoughts on giving a man a fish and teaching a man to fish. Grenada applauds the sacrifices of the Republic of China in this regard.

Indeed, the Republic of China has wrought an economic miracle, to the point where it is the fourteenth most important trading country and its foreign reserves rank among the top in the world.

The international community cannot simply ignore the aspirations of such a dynamic and generous people, and should thus ensure that the fundamental right of the 22 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan to participate in the activities of the United Nations be fully respected.

Equally, in the name of humanity and justice, Grenada calls for the lifting of the economic embargo against the Republic of Cuba. World opinion is definitely swayed towards this, and consequently overwhelming support is given year after year to the relevant resolutions at the United Nations on this issue. Sadly, though, enforcement is still outstanding. As we are about to close another chapter in the history of mankind, we appeal to the Government of the United States of America to once more take the lead in showing its humane qualities and ease the pain and suffering of ordinary Cubans. It should therefore suspend all sanctions unconditionally.

As we look to the new century we must urge that there be a Middle East of peaceful coexistence, particularly between Israel and the Palestinians.

We certainly hope that past events in the Balkans — particularly in Yugoslavia — will not be repeated; and that the principle of self-determination will be respected

globally, the situation in East Timor being a case in point; that the various pockets of conflict around the world will be resolved amicably; and that any changes contemplated within the United Nations system will take into account the concerns and aspirations of smaller nations.

Grenada believes that, with the collective efforts of all States and the purposeful involvement of the United Nations, democracy, social justice, good governance, solidarity and the economic prosperity of all our Members could be achieved.

Finally, my country extends its concern and sympathy to the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and, more recently, to our friends in the Republic of China on Taiwan, a country so helpful to us in the promotion of sustainable development.

We are also mindful of the situation in East Timor and hope that as soon as order and security are restored, independence, for which the majority voted, will take root.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

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General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

21st plenary meeting
Friday, 1 October 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Gambari (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, His Excellency Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves.

Mr. Ilves (Estonia): Let me begin by congratulating Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I wish him all the best in carrying out his duties.

As the General Assembly convenes for the last time before the Millennium Assembly, I believe that it is appropriate to consider the United Nations future and how we can prepare our Organization for the twenty-first century.

Fifty-four years after its founding, the United Nations remains the largest multi-purpose intergovernmental Organization in the world. Indeed, with 188 Members, the United Nations has become truly global. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga to the United Nations family.

The United Nations faces a vastly different set of international issues from those of fifty-four years ago, when the Organization was founded. Most threats to international security and stability are no longer State-driven but rather derive from the malfunction or dysfunction of States. The consequences of these threats, however, are just as severe as the erstwhile threats by States. Terrorism, corruption, economic collapse, nuclear meltdowns, mass migration and ethnic strife are but a few of the challenges that the world has had to face in recent years. The violent conflict in East Timor, "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, and the recent re-escalation of violence in Chechnya are but a few vivid examples of the new kinds of threats that we face today.

The United Nations has a crucial role to play in combating these and other international threats. But before it can start to play a more active role in the post-cold-war international order, serious structural reforms are needed.

Estonia believes that reforms should focus above all on the Security Council. Formally, the Council, originally intended to be the cornerstone of collective security, is vested with strong executive authority. Yet in practice its authority is challenged. Because of a recurring failure or inability to take action, countries in crisis situations look less and less to the Council. In order for the United Nations to avoid relegation to the status of a body that creates norms but cannot ensure their implementation, voting procedures and mechanisms in the United Nations most powerful body should be reformed.

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The key issue is voting practice, not the shopworn issue of non-permanent membership. The often irresponsible exercise of the veto, or even more often the threat of the veto, has paralysed the Security Council and undermined its legitimacy. More and more often we witness some permanent members taking actions to meet their domestic interests and foreign policy goals in areas irrelevant to the issue at hand. We as Member States have given the mandate to the Council. Even before we are able to carry out the reforms, we must entrust the permanent members to use the veto with utmost responsibility.

As we look around this Hall, or at the globe, we can all observe that the world today is not what it was half a century ago — thank God. The United Nations was created to maintain peace in the wake of the turmoil of the Second World War. Today we are already into the second decade of the post-cold-war order, two generations removed from the problems faced by our grandfathers. Why, then, should we be constrained by obsolescent structures still based on the power relationships of 1945? The guarantors of and greatest contributors to stability in the world have changed fundamentally in the course of half a century. We need not fear opening a discussion on whether the moral and legal reasoning underlying Security Council membership in the wake of the Second World War is still appropriate for the post-cold-war era.

Following from this, another area where Estonia believes reforms are vitally needed is that of the informal regional groups that provide the basis for election procedures. Many of these groups are based on a now irrelevant cold war ideological and geopolitical alignment. A decade after the end of the cold war the East-West divide has disappeared, and regional groups, such as the Eastern European Group, which were a product of that divide, simply no longer make sense. In order to make United Nations structures correspond to today's realities, those regional groups should become truly geographic.

Allow me now to turn to economic and social development. We can all agree that over the years the United Nations has been most successful in that area. The United Nations system has devoted more attention and resources to development than to any other international assistance effort. Although these non-political activities have received less attention than efforts in the field of peacekeeping and diplomacy, they are no less important. Many countries, including mine, have benefited from United Nations assistance. We believe, however, that it is time to start to pay back.

Providing development and humanitarian assistance is a logical and moral consequence of our membership of the international community. It should be the goal of every country. In this regard, I would like to observe that most United Nations activities, whether in the field of peacekeeping or economic assistance, almost invariably become permanent. Permanence, however, is not a sign of success; it is a sign of failure. The United Nations should therefore concentrate more on preventive actions and on implementing well-planned, well-targeted and timely programmes with a clear exit strategy. That, in turn, will encourage success and positive development, not dependency.

Estonia values the United Nations function as a normative Organization that sets international standards and universal principles for its Members. The gross violations of human rights witnessed this year, including killings and mass deportations reminiscent of those experienced by my country 50 years ago, show that it is more important than ever that countries adhere to common international norms and standards in the field of human rights. As the only truly global Organization, the United Nations should play a greater role in making sure that universal principles, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, are fairly and fully applied. To pursue this goal I call upon all countries to support wholeheartedly the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Every year hundreds and thousands of innocent people perish as a result of brutal terrorist actions. The General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions on the fight against terrorism, and currently no fewer than 11 anti-terrorism conventions have been adopted. In the light of the recent terrorist attacks in Russia, we believe that the fight against terrorism should be pursued with even greater zeal. Terrorism of all kinds should be globally condemned and eradicated. At the same time, however, the fight against terrorism should not serve as a pretext for equally gross violations of human rights, forcible detention and the deportation of tens of thousands of innocent people all over a country without due process, simply because of the colour of their skin or their ethnic background.

Allow me to conclude by saying a few words on the issue of financing. If the United Nations is to enter the twenty-first century as a serious and effective Organization, we must commit ourselves to economic realities. This means administrative reform, zero budget

growth and fiscal responsibility, combined with a firm commitment by all countries to pay their share.

The gist of Estonia's message is that the world has changed dramatically in the past half century. Let us adapt the Organization to reflect the realities of today. Let us make the United Nations an Organization that will continue to play a vital and prominent role far into the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in Lao; French text furnished by the delegation*): The unanimous election of Mr. Gurirab to the presidency of the General Assembly at this fifty-fourth session is a warm tribute to Namibia and its heroic people, who are well-known for their victorious struggle against foreign domination and for their tireless defence of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. As I am familiar with his skill and broad experience of international relations, I believe that under his wise leadership the work of the General Assembly at this session will be crowned with success.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere congratulations to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, for his work to reform and revitalize the United Nations, as well as for his steadfast commitment in the service of peace and development throughout the world.

As this century of rapid change fades away, we are confronted with challenges, but also presented with many opportunities. Globalization has become a problem throughout the world. While technological progress and the globalization of production and finance have brought prosperity and modernity to many countries, particularly in the developed world, the great majority of people are still living in conditions of persistent poverty. The protection of the environment, the eradication of poverty and the struggle against drugs and all forms of terrorism have also become urgent problems requiring concerted action at global level.

In the face of this situation it is more urgent than ever for the international community to adopt concrete collective measures to enable the United Nations to devote more of its resources to social and economic development in order to build a better life for all the world's peoples, in particular for the poorest among them. If it is to take up these challenges, the United Nations, as the only universal international organization, needs the capacity to act and to adapt to a new and changing world situation.

With the end of the bipolar world, many countries, especially developing countries, had hoped that the nuclear era would end as well. Here, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, along with the other countries members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), signed the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, which entered into force in 1997. It also endorsed the joint declaration of 9 June 1998, subscribed to by the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden, the objective of which was to revitalize nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. Such positive steps will help us together gradually to build a world free of nuclear weapons, thus creating meaningful guarantees for the survival of mankind.

To guarantee peace, to promote the development of all countries, and to adapt to a new world situation, the Organization must be reformed so that it can fulfil its mandate and achieve its purposes. Here in the United Nations, all countries have equal standing, in conformity with the principle of the sovereign equality of States. And here in the United Nations, we extol the principles of the non-use or threat of use of force against the independence or sovereignty of States, of the peaceful settlement of disputes, and of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States.

In speaking of United Nations reform we cannot pass in silence by the delicate work under way in the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council, where a number of interesting initiatives have been put forward. Our position on this matter is well known, and was set out at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly: we favour an increase in both the permanent and the non-permanent membership, in line with the principle of equitable geographical distribution and taking into account the prominence of the country in question. As part of the effort to attain that goal, some countries — such as, in particular, Japan, Germany and India — could become permanent members of a restructured Security Council. As we all know, the question of Council reform is not a

simple one. We need to be patient, to continue the debate and to take advantage of the momentum we have created, so as to attain the goal of giving that organ greater transparency, legitimacy and, above all, credibility.

True to its consistent policy of peace, friendship and cooperation, the Lao People's Democratic Republic considers that the use of force against a sovereign independent State without Security Council authorization, no matter what the pretext, runs counter to international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We believe that all conflicts, no matter how complex, should be resolved only through negotiations.

Convinced of the importance of peace in the Middle East, my country is pleased that Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization have resumed serious negotiations, which led to the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999. It is essential for the parties directly concerned to continue those negotiations in order to settle their problems on the basis of existing resolutions and agreements. This would open the path to peace, cooperation and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

Among the glaring injustices in the world, we cannot forget the economic, trade and financial blockade that has been waged for more than 40 years against the Republic of Cuba. We consider that the United States ought to put an end to that operation, which runs counter to the present world trend towards international economic cooperation for development.

Peace on the Korean peninsula remains fragile. We appeal to all the countries concerned to show maximal restraint and to continue their dialogue with a view to restoring mutual understanding, and together to seek solutions that would meet the aspirations of the Korean people for the peaceful reunification of the two parts of Korea, and that would contribute to the consolidation of peace, stability and cooperation in the region.

Since 9 July 1999 we have seen renewed tension in the Taiwan Strait. The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its consistent position that Taiwan is an integral and inalienable part of China, and that the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal and legitimate representative of the entire Chinese people.

Over the past two years, the financial crisis affecting the whole of South-East Asia has quickly made itself felt, to varying degrees, in other regions — indeed, throughout the world. In some countries there are today signs of an economic upturn, but nothing indicates that the world economy is yet on the road to solid recovery. In the light of that crisis and of the fact that countries large and small, industrialized and developing, are becoming increasingly interdependent, the international community must work together to find an effective solution to the crisis, to promote worldwide growth, and to bring about sustained social and economic development.

Since the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, the struggle against impoverishment has been bolstered. But it is clear that developing countries, especially the least developed among them, cannot accomplish this huge task on their own and without the necessary support and assistance of the international community. In that context, we consider that the special follow-up meeting that will take place in 2000 will give the international community an opportunity to review the situation and to take the measures necessary to attain the noble goals set at the Summit.

For years, the special problems of landlocked developing countries have been discussed at various international conferences and meetings. Although many measures have been taken both at the national and at the international levels, those problems are still far from being resolved.

The President took the Chair.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, which has the honour of chairing the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, is cooperating actively with the other member countries to establish and maintain an effective and self-sustaining system of transport and transit. This huge task requires support and assistance from the entire international community in order for our countries to meet our particular needs. It is more than urgent that the recommendations adopted last August in New York at the fourth meeting of governmental experts from landlocked and transit developing countries and representatives of donor countries, and financial and development institutions, be wholly translated into reality as soon as possible.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic over the past year, the multi-ethnic Lao people has strongly unified itself and is actively working for national development, particularly in the area of agricultural production. This has made it possible for us not only to achieve self-sufficiency in rice production, but also to

have something of a surplus in reserve. This achievement has helped soften the effects of the economic and financial crisis in the region. Throughout the country, political stability and social harmony, important conditions allowing us to promote sustained national socio-economic development in keeping with the policy of renewal, continue to be ensured.

At the international level, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is continuing its efforts to strengthen and extend its external relations and cooperation, particularly with neighbouring countries, and it is cooperating with other members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations in the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action and of the Vision 2020 for the progress and the prosperity of the region.

The question of drugs continues to be a major concern in the daily life of South-East Asia. In this respect, my Government has made great efforts to reduce the annual production of opium and is carrying out a vigorous battle against drugs, the results of which have been greatly appreciated by the international community. At this time, in cooperation with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), we are working out a strategy for a substantial eradication of opium production over the next six years. In this connection, I appeal to the international community to contribute to the Fund UNDCP in order to achieve those objectives.

Saving future generations from the scourges of war, poverty, hunger and sickness remains an essential objective enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Aware of this highest goal, the Lao People's Democratic Republic will spare no effort to make its modest yet positive contribution.

The President: I next give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar, Her Excellency Mrs. Lila Hanitra Ratsifandriamanana.

Mrs. Ratsifandriamanana (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): Sharing: this will be the theme of my statement from this rostrum, because at the end of this millennium, when globalization rhymes with poverty, insecurity, social ills and natural disasters, the culture of sharing should, more than ever, guide our actions.

I want to share, first of all, Mr. President, our satisfaction at seeing you conduct the proceedings of this fifty-fourth session. Along with everyone else, and on behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, I would like to share my profound conviction that your reputation on the international scene is an asset that will guide our discussions towards encouraging results. A talented diplomat and a worthy representative of a people that has become a symbol of heroism and patriotism, you enjoy our confidence, our support and our admiration.

We would also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Minister Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for having held and passed on the torch that he carried with all the competence and determination one would expect of him.

Furthermore, to the Secretary-General we offer thanks and recognition for his devotion and wise dynamism. He has known how to be the spokesman for aspirations of harmony, justice and progress. Under his enlightened guidance and leadership, our Organization is today well prepared to order the twenty-first century.

I wish to join my voice to those of previous speakers in greeting and welcoming the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, which have just enlarged our United Nations community. Let them share with us the noble ideals that brought us together and keep us together: the equality of peoples under the law, respect for the sovereignty of every State, democracy and peace.

Sharing with everyone, our pride in belonging to the great family of the United Nations, our forum for meeting, discussion, decision-making and solidarity; sharing the values that provide the foundations for our international community; and sharing in the vital programmes of cooperation carried out synergistically among all the different actors and constituents of our structure and system — these, specifically, are the sources of our satisfaction.

Today, less than 100 days from the new century and the new millennium, we are keenly aware of the timeliness of our discussions. Our fifty-fourth session is of particular significance in that it offers all of us the opportunity not only to undertake a retrospective examination of the major events of the century, but also to seek ways and means to inject renewed dynamism into future international relations.

The commitments we made at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly must be implemented as rapidly as possible. We can achieve this through concerted efforts and our shared determination to succeed.

However, to do this, we must proceed urgently to apply the necessary measures for the restructuring of our Organization.

We reiterate our support for the position of the Organization of African Unity regarding the need to expand the Security Council. The restructuring of that organ must be based on the principles of democracy, transparency and equitable geographic distribution. On the question of the veto, in our view there is no room for equivocation: either it must be extended to all permanent members or it must be abolished.

Our presence and our interactive participation in the concert of nations prompts us to share our thinking on certain subjects that constitute challenges of the highest priority at the end of the century, particularly the questions of armed conflict, the maintenance of peace, disarmament, international terrorism, democracy and human rights, and human and socio-economic development.

While accelerating the integration of our global society, the end of the era of ideological confrontation has been conducive to the proliferation of conflicts of a political, socio-economic, ethnic, cultural or religious nature.

Is there any need to stress that in all these conflict situations the most vulnerable sectors of society — especially children, women and the elderly — are the first victims. Madagascar therefore shares the general satisfaction with the adoption by the Security Council of resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

There are some signs of satisfaction and hope: the signing last 4 September of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum; the signing in Lomé on 7 July 1999 of a Peace Agreement for the conflict in Sierra Leone; and the 10 July 1999 signing of the Ceasefire Agreement between the principal parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nonetheless, we note that, unfortunately, many hotbeds of tension remain or are being created throughout the world. The tragic situations in Angola, Somalia, Afghanistan and Kosovo are clear examples of this.

As regards East Timor, Madagascar pays tribute to the courageous efforts of the United Nations Mission in East Timor during the electoral process. We particularly welcome the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999), on decisive measures to put an end to the crisis and to ensure strict respect for human rights.

As regards Western Sahara, Madagascar endorses the initiative of the United Nations to organize a free, honest and impartial referendum, as well as the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara until 14 December 1999.

We in Madagascar have lived in peace, but we have always been aware of the need to preserve the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, and thus we are concerned about the situation in the Comoros, our close neighbour. We therefore welcome the opportunity to have hosted, in April this year at Antananarivo, the Comorian inter-island conference, under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). We urge the international community to maintain the efforts to implement the Antananarivo accord so as to bring about a democratic and unified Comorian state.

Last year marked the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations. We salute the initiatives for cooperation between the United Nations and the OAU and between the European Union, the OAU and subregional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States. Nevertheless, in our view these actions should be in keeping with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, such as respect for the sovereignty of States, respect for territorial integrity and non-intervention in internal affairs.

While we recognize the usefulness of peacekeeping operations, Madagascar considers that disarmament is inseparable from any effort to consolidate peace. Indeed, the increasing deadliness of conflicts is connected with the excessive accumulation of light weapons, of which there are now an estimated 500 million. In our view the problem must be resolved upstream, because practically all the hotbeds of tension are maintained by the production and sale of such weapons and illicit trafficking in them. As a party to the international conventions on the non-proliferation of weapons and illicit trafficking in them, Madagascar supports the idea of an international conference on the illicit arms trade, in all its aspects.

As we turn the page on a millennium tarnished by wars and conflicts, general disarmament must be a common and shared objective. In this regard, on 25 August of this year Madagascar associated itself with the ratification of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel

landmines. Convinced that there can be no security in a world teeming with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, Madagascar welcomes the holding next year of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Another concern of our times is the struggle against international terrorism, a struggle in which we should be steadfastly united. This is why we wish to we wish to support the development of a draft international convention to block the financing of terrorism. Our active participation at the last OAU summit, held in Algiers, in the adoption of a convention for preventing and fighting terrorism, demonstrates our determination to eradicate this scourge. Furthermore, this very day we have signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings.

At a time when all the inhabitants of the planet share the desire to live free from the horrors of violence, discrimination and exclusion, respect for democratic principles is no longer just a precept: it has become an absolute necessity. We therefore exhort the international community to condemn firmly any taking of power by non-democratic means. As the principal guarantor of universal values, the United Nations is called upon to take the lead in this area.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, working together to promote human development and human rights is an obligation. This year, 1999 — the International Year of Older Persons — is crucial for the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at Vienna in 1982. Madagascar therefore welcomes the initiative to convene in 2002 a special session of the General Assembly devoted to the updating of this Plan of Action.

The right to development is inseparable from the effective exercise of human rights. It must enjoy international support and solidarity so that development is extended to all human beings, not just to a privileged minority. For its part, Madagascar has spared no effort to strengthen its institutional capacities. A National Human Rights Commission and an observer office for human rights have been established. We have also signed agreements with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to assist in promoting human rights.

Aware of the revival of transnational traffic in women and children as well as of modern forms of slavery, Madagascar adopted on 25 January 1999 a law designed to combat paedophilia. Furthermore, we welcome the conventions produced under the aegis of the International Labour Organization on the employment of children and young people. Personally, I am happy to have signed the letter addressed to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, from all the female Ministers for Foreign Affairs, a letter that reiterates our unwavering support for the fight against trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children.

From one year to the next we are beset by the same concerns. We do not wish to call it routine, but our agenda nevertheless reveals that we must experience the same concerns time and again. The century is drawing to an end without the resolution of two major problems: poverty and the increase in social inequality. One billion people live in extreme poverty, while another billion are enjoying a life of increasing luxury. Furthermore, a recent study has shown that at the beginning of the next century we can expect the ratio of income differential between the rich and the poor countries to be on the order of 150 to one.

Our claims are therefore as legitimate as ever, while our efforts at development remain hampered by the continuing and ever-growing deterioration of the terms of trade, by our strict dependence on external capital, and by the disproportionate concentration of direct foreign investment in economic sectors to which access is restricted.

Without wishing to belittle the advantages of the inescapable phenomenon of globalization, our fears remain profound in the face of the emergence of a unipolar order, which in certain cases promotes marginalization, precariousness and insecurity; reduces our Governments' room to manoeuvre or capacity to act; and sometimes even affects our countries' exercise of their own sovereignty.

We therefore say "no" to selective globalization when it comes to liberalization, inasmuch as we are being called on to liberalize our trade, investments and financial flows at an accelerated pace, while this impulse to liberalize has not been nearly so strong in the case of products of interest to our countries or in the promotion of access to know-how and technologies.

The lack of consistency within the new world system also applies to the links between our economic adjustment programmes and the various social and environmental objectives: the struggle against poverty, the establishment of basic social infrastructures, the

security safety net and the protection and development of our environmental resources.

While in no way calling into question the commitments undertaken to its development partners, Madagascar expresses its solidarity with all the developing countries in calling for improved integration within the world economic system, allowing the promotion of regular and socially harmonious growth with a human and ecological face.

The challenges are numerous and varied. The elimination of poverty remains our priority. We continue to believe that this problem will be resolved only if the pace of economic growth is accelerated and maintained. The international anti-poverty strategy must include concrete measures to strengthen national efforts in such areas as job creation, improved functioning of markets and social and political institutions, and the active participation of vulnerable groups in development.

The problem of external debt is a political question of the highest importance in international economic relations and remains a genuine obstacle to the growth of most developing countries. Arrangements and accords to date have provided only limited solutions because of conditions of eligibility, new conditionalities, selectivity in loan-making, the excessive length of negotiations and constraints connected to mandatory circulation.

We welcome the debt-reduction plan approved recently at the G-8 Summit in Cologne, but the slow pace at which the reduction would seem to yield benefits tends to erode our hopes. This plan should be interpreted flexibly by the international financial institutions so that it may benefit all debtors without exception. The African debt warrants particular attention because of these countries' very limited capacity for repayment. Indicators show that the African can never be repaid. We therefore call simply for its total cancellation.

We are deeply concerned by the reduction of official development assistance, which today represents less than one third of the international target agreed more than 20 years ago. It is urgent that this trend be reversed. Given the importance of this question, Madagascar is following with particular interest the preparatory work for the international meeting on all aspects of development financing. The discussion on reforming the international financial architecture is of the greatest interest to us, the objective being to free additional and foreseeable resources for development and to strengthen the systems that control, monitor and regulate financial flows.

With regard to international trade, we support the message of the Group of 77 addressed to the forthcoming meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, as well as the Marrakesh Declaration with regard to the preparation of the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X), scheduled for Bangkok early next year.

The question of commodities remains a subject of major concern to our countries. We therefore support the efforts of the relevant international institutions, UNCTAD in particular, to find more effective machinery that would allow us to increase our export earnings.

Recognized as a global nature sanctuary because of the wealth of its biodiversity, Madagascar remains deeply concerned by environmental problems. We follow with interest all United Nations activities for sustainable development and renew our appeal for increased support from our partners in the implementation of our national environmental programme, currently in phase 2.

To meet these challenges, we have two options. First, we are convinced that the reform targets we are contemplating can be achieved only within the framework of revitalized international economic cooperation. This would require a resumption of the North-South dialogue. In this context, major international economic meetings should be guided by a spirit of solidarity and a sense of share responsibility between the various development partners. We must therefore advocate a global and integrated approach to replace sectoral schemes, which are necessarily inadequate.

The second option, which we feel to be a prerequisite, requires the strengthening of South-South cooperation. In advance even of the process of integration within the inevitable system of globalization, it is natural — even imperative — for the southern countries to organize themselves. Our progress in this area, being dispersed and isolated, has proved slow. Of course, we recognize that priorities, methods and schedules differ. We must concede, however, that the implementation stage of such cooperation now calls for the much greater unity and genuine political involvement of member countries.

In this manner, we envisage a reorganization of the South at all levels — subregional, regional, continental

and global — grouping together all developing countries. Madagascar is firmly committed to this approach. That is why, at the subregional and regional levels, we are participating within the Indian Ocean Commission in the implementation of a regional sustainable development policy, to be endorsed by the forthcoming summit of heads of State and Government on 3 December. As a full member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Madagascar was among the first to decide to apply, on a reciprocal basis, a tariff reduction of 80 per cent for the products of member States. This tariff preference is a prelude to a free-trade zone.

At the continental level, we welcome the appeal launched at the recent fourth Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of African Unity at Sirte for greater economic integration in Africa. Indeed, participants in this conference clearly affirmed that greater unity is one way to resist the threat of globalization looming over the continent. Together with all African countries, Madagascar urges the international community to lend its material and financial support and to share with our continent its own experiences in its achievement of unity.

According to United Nations resolutions, Africa in the 1990s has been a priority for action against poverty and insecurity. In this regard, I welcome the financial commitment of $150 million, announced three days ago on 28 September by Mr. James Wolfensohn, President of the West Bank, to its Partnership for African Capacity.

The contribution of every Member State to forging a new Africa is an obligation. With this in mind, over the past three years Madagascar has built a structure that will promote democracy, human rights and multifaceted cooperation. An entire field of activity has opened up today, making our big island a major actor in regional, continental and international life.

The principle of sharing has been implicit in the activities of our Organization since its Charter was written. Whatever reforms it has undergone and will undergo, we agree that it is important to preserve among us this noble principle, a rallying cry for our actions. There is also sharing to be done to reduce economic discrepancies which have been growing over the last two decades; sharing to remedy the asymmetry of trade, if not actually to redefine such trade, and to ensure that such progress is immanent; and sharing to put an end to the role of war so as to finally initiate the role of peace.

We remain convinced that only the United Nations will be a true instigator of the culture of peace, prosperity and humanism in this world which must be interdependent. We share the wish for success in the forthcoming great meetings in the year 2000: at Bangkok for the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, at Havana for the South Summit, and here in this very Hall for the Millennium Summit.

The President: I call on the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, His Excellency Mr. Domingo Siazon.

Mr. Siazon (Philippines): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you as you take on the honour and responsibility of leading the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Allow me to express our deep appreciation to His Excellency Minister Didier Opertti, who led us last year with admirable efficiency, insight and, on occasion, good humour. I take this opportunity also to commend the Secretary-General for his dedication and inspiring leadership in the service of our Organization.

I would also like to welcome Presidents Teburoro Tito, Rene Harris and King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, their delegations and the people of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga, all fellow members of the Asia-Pacific family, to the United Nations. Their membership in our Organization should further bolster the global consensus on peace and progress in the world.

Almost a decade ago the cold war ended and we are today at the doorstep of a new century. Over those years, we achieved much as individual nations and as Members of this Organization. Yet, our collective search for peace and progress for all continues. After many years of eloquent debates, after hearing many persuasive proposals and formulations, how well indeed have we mastered the language of peace. But the wars and strife that afflict our world, even as we speak, show that we have neither fully learned nor lived the ways of peace. As at its founding, our Organization is faced with the dire spectre of countless multitudes living in utter dread and misery.

The much-touted new global order, where nations live in harmony and peace, where growth and sustainable development are rights and not privileges and where justice rules and human rights are upheld remains a promise. We encounter newer threats to the peace, and old threats are re-emerging. Poverty stalks many lands. Far too many people have their human rights ignored or

violated. Our very Earth protests decades of unbridled abuse.

One of the clear victors at the end of the cold war was the free market. For most of our lives, the assault upon the very idea and practice of the free market came from an ideology. Today, even that ideology embraces the methods, if not the spirit, of the free market. It now seems that the growing reach of the free market, or globalization, is held back only by our inability to adapt to it fast enough.

For so many years, East Asia was admired for its success with globalization. The so-called East Asian miracle was little more than our region's economic response to it. Our fast growth doubled our incomes and moved tens of millions of our people out of poverty. Up until July 1997, we thought all was well.

Now we know better; we have learned our lessons. Our difficulties could have been less severe or avoided with better public and corporate governance, with better management of financial systems, with greater transparency and accountability; in other words, with greater openness, which is the heart and spirit of the free market or any truly free system.

Happily, the crisis did not destroy the conditions underpinning East Asia's growth formula of outward-oriented industrialization. A propensity for high savings, abundant highly educated human resources, higher productivity and economic reform policies remain.

Today, East Asia is on the road to recovery. Consumer confidence is rising. Exports are booming. Inflation has been tamed. Investors are coming back. Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia are all growing again. The Philippine economy will grow by more than 3 percent this year and over 5 percent next year. Yet, there is no retreat on our core reform agenda. Economic restructurings continue. Greater economic integration goes on. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, for instance, took extraordinary steps to underscore their commitment to free trade and investment. During its Hanoi summit last year, ASEAN resolved to accelerate, not retard, the establishment of the ASEAN free trade area to the year 2002. We are accelerating the implementation of the ASEAN Investment Area and ASEAN Industrial Cooperation schemes. We have also moved towards greater financial cooperation by establishing at the Asian Development Bank a regional economic monitoring and surveillance mechanism. It should encourage transparency, institute better coordination of economic policies and help ward off future financial crises.

However, internal reforms cannot be enough. The crisis also exposed the weaknesses lurking in the international system. Realizing early on that the phenomenon of globalization should be addressed multilaterally, the United Nations has sought the cooperation of other multilateral organizations to strengthen normative, legal and institutional frameworks in the hope that the global economy can be managed more effectively and, perhaps more importantly, more equitably. For the yawning gap between poor and rich nations continues to widen, and the pace and level of development of countries are, alas, more uneven.

In a fast-globalizing and interdependent world, augmenting the ability of developing countries to participate fully in the global economy is the win-win solution for all. Insecure market access, high levels of protection and support of agriculture in industrialized countries and the continued high tariffs on industrial products from developing countries obviate greater progress for all.

The international trading system must adopt a new paradigm in which sustainable development should be the central theme. The World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference to be held in Seattle late this year should be not only an opportunity to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. It should also be an occasion to imbue the process with a sense of direction that responds to the development needs of developing countries.

The global financial architecture must be strengthened. There is urgent need, as the Committee for Development Policy pointed out in its 1998 report to the Economic and Social Council, for the coherent development and effective monitoring of international standards and codes of conduct for private financial management and capital flows. There is also need to curb destructive competition and inconsistency in national regulatory frameworks.

More and more, countries and regions need to reach out to one another in the spirit of cooperation and partnership for development. The ten-year-old Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, or APEC, is founded on this conviction. So is the much younger Asia-Europe Meeting, or ASEM. And it heartens us that the East Asia-Latin America Forum, having recently

taken its first steps, may soon join in the more sustained and structured effort to link up for global progress. The Philippines anticipates a similar region-to-region initiative with Africa and will contribute its utmost to any such initiative.

From a historical perspective, we are still at the very early stage of globalization. With globalization having the potential to grow exponentially, as do the revolutions in technology and information that fuel it, this early stage is perhaps the most critical one. Only earnest international cooperation can ensure that this process does not lead to the marginalization of any nation.

But, as our recent experience in East Asia shows, economic progress alone cannot and does not engender the optimal well-being of nations or peoples. Progress in ensuring political stability and security should accompany growth. Any asymmetry in the pace, breadth and depth of change in these facets of the political economy is a seed of future instability. Moreover, just as our economic prospects are determined by our participation in the global economy, our future peace and security will depend not only on our internal resilience, but also on the active cooperation of others.

In East Asia the most urgent undertaking for ensuring peace is the reconfiguration of the strategic security structure in the region. The holes left gaping by the end of the cold war must be filled; the new parameters of the regional security equation must be defined. The situation in the Taiwan Strait is a concern to us all. So are the issues of missile development in the Korean peninsula and nuclear development and uneasy peace in South Asia.

The South China Sea remains a potential flashpoint. We are hopeful that, in addition to measures advancing regional economic and financial cooperation, a regional code of conduct in the South China Sea can be adopted at the summit of leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea that we are hosting in Manila in November.

East Asia has clearly not yet settled all its great issues of war and peace. But we are trying hard and succeeding in some important ways. At the sixth ASEAN Regional Forum — the only forum on security that includes all the major Powers with a stake in our region — we agreed to draft rules of procedure by which preventive diplomacy could bolster and complement regional confidence-building measures. Last December we agreed to move closer to the full activation of the ASEAN High Council and the dispute settlement mechanisms mandated by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

The 5 May 1999 Agreement on East Timor and the free, fair and orderly conduct of the 30 August consultations there are truly significant developments for lasting peace in our region. For the Philippines, it is of the utmost importance that the chaos there be quickly resolved and the horrendous human suffering be stanched. We therefore welcome Indonesia's decision to invite the assistance of the United Nations and of a multinational force, and its creation of a national commission of inquiry to investigate and bring to justice persons responsible for the atrocities and human rights violations in East Timor. We also commend the Secretary-General and the neighbouring and other countries for responding quickly to restore order and facilitate humanitarian relief in East Timor. As a fraternal neighbour of the peoples of Indonesia and East Timor, we will contribute all we can to ameliorate the humanitarian situation and put back on track a peaceful transition.

Elsewhere, the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement is a positive development for the Middle East peace process. We are also heartened by the agreements reached recently in Sierra Leone and the Congo, and between Eritrea and Ethiopia. We hope that the resolution of the immediate crisis in Kosovo will soon create the conditions conducive to the establishment of lasting peace there.

It is true that we have avoided major inter-State conflicts of late, and that States are more willing to resolve disputes peacefully. But the continuing tensions in various regions of the world could still draw nations into conflict and divert attention and resources away from development. For the Philippines, regional cooperation provides a key to managing potential and actual conflict situations. We have seen this in the efforts of the ASEAN troika, the United Nations and the international community to restore political stability in Cambodia, and in the dispatch of a multinational force to East Timor with authorization from the Security Council and upon the invitation of the Indonesian Government.

We agree with the Secretary-General that it is necessary and desirable to provide support for regional and subregional arrangements and initiatives on matters of international peace and security. The United Nations, lacking the capacity, resources and expertise to address all issues unique to each region of the world, should complement rather than supplant regional peace efforts.

This, however, will require significant investment from all of us. In the first instance, we need to invest a lot of goodwill and build trust in one another so that clearer criteria and a more predictable basis can guide Security Council authorization for all types of peace missions. We realize that no two situations are the same, but inaction due to stalemates in the Council, in the face of serious threats to peace and human life, threatens the credibility, legitimacy and future effectiveness of our Organization.

Secondly, the Organization and its Member States need to invest in practical steps that can be taken in the areas of training assistance, joint peacekeeping exercises, greater participation in standby arrangements, partnerships between countries whose contingents require equipment support and those able to provide it, and closer cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations.

And thirdly, perhaps more important, we need to invest our work and way of thinking with greater flexibility and innovation. The nature of conflict has changed. Crises and humanitarian situations now involve many more actors, from Governments and international organizations to non-State players. And their effects, just like their causes, are more complex and far-reaching.

Let us face it, much of what was considered before as the internal affairs of a State is not so any more — or ever. Humanity is indivisible. Peace is indivisible.

State sovereignty is important; it will always be. So is individual sovereignty. That the redefinition of one should coincide with the renewed consciousness of the other is, to my delegation, not an accident. These developments need not even be seen as parallel, as in they do not meet; for in truth, they converge.

But we agree with the Secretary-General that the more important question is how the United Nations — the only truly universal, if imperfect, arm of the international community — is to respond to the political, human rights and humanitarian crises affecting so much of the world. We have to be more innovative in our approaches to problems relating to massive and systematic human rights violations. We agree that empowering the United Nations enough to match its Charter mandates in today's and tomorrow's world requires that we, the Member States, update our concept of national interest.

Last year, before this Assembly, I articulated Philippine policy, thus:

> "Like all other States, the Philippines pursues foreign policy to promote national security and development. But we view national security beyond the traditional concerns of sovereignty and territorial integrity. For in a global regime characterized by evolving multipolarity of political and military power and by growing economic and financial interdependence, with all their attendant opportunities and risks, my nation's peace and prosperity increasingly depend on stability and growth abroad. As President Estrada has said: Our way of life, our fundamental values and our institutions can flourish and find true expression only if we enjoy political stability, economic solidarity, socio-cultural cohesion, moral consensus and ecological balance, at home and with our partners in the world. Our national security and development" [or in short, our national interest] "demand that we actively advance the internationally shared goals of freedom, openness, peace, prosperity and justice." *(A/53/PV.17, p.6)*

After the events of the last year, we are more convinced that the collective interest, our common interest, is my country's national interest.

The need to reform the United Nations is our common interest. Reforms should not only seek to make the United Nations more efficient; they should make it truly responsive to the new demands of international peace, security and development.

The Security Council, with its wide mandate and leadership role, should be at the centre of change and reform itself. It should be truly representative, democratic, transparent and accountable. The use of the veto should be rationalized.

The day may come when we shall have achieved consensus on the reforms that we wish for our Organization. The day may also come — and soon I hope — that the financial morass our Organization is in will have passed.

But while these are critical to the very survival of the United Nations, the continued existence of our Organization would be far more meaningful if we could invest it with a new openness and greater trust. The Philippines believes that to achieve this, we must start at home, in our own regions. We must, in appropriate circumstances, be more open to hearing the views of others and offering our own, even on issues deemed too

controversial. A new openness would reflect the boldness with which we should renew the promise of a new era.

The United Nations proved its great worth in this century. Its continued success in the next will depend entirely on us, on the goals we hope to achieve with it, on what we are willing to invest in it. After all, we are the United Nations.

The President: I now call on the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Vanuatu, His Excellency the Honourable Clement Leo.

Mr. Leo (Vanuatu): On behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to this high and important post. Your unanimous election as President of the fifty-fourth session of General Assembly shows the esteem in which the international community holds both you, personally, and your country, Namibia. The Republic of Vanuatu's delegation is confident that you will guide the session to a successful conclusion.

May I take this opportunity, through you, to express my delegation's sincere appreciation on your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for his outstanding stewardship in facilitating the work of the fifty-third session.

I wish to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his wise leadership and dedication to the reform and restructuring of our Organization. Through you, Mr. President, we would like to assure him of our support.

Four years ago, we gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization — in particular, to renew our commitment to the fundamental principles which created it in 1945.

We have also made strong a commitment to further strengthen our collaborative and genuine efforts in ensuring that this Organization continues to promote global peace, justice, healthy environment, human rights, law and order, and support the process of sustainable development of its Member nations — in particular, the least developed countries (LDCs) such as those in the Pacific region, including the Republic of Vanuatu.

The current international political and economic situation has grown ever more complex and demanding on our very limited and scarce resources as well as on the support available from our development partners.

We are deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of international crimes of all sorts — drug trafficking, money laundering, human rights violations, terrorism, organized crime and other similar activities which have the potential of placing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of small island States at great risk. The international community must be seen to genuinely collaborate in combating these criminal phenomena if the new philosophy of globalization is to positively progress and if we are to advance into the new millennium with fresh and renewed hope to build a better future for our children.

We do not believe that the world is doing us justice and the fundamental principles of peace and economic prosperity as enshrined in the Charter if we do not observe our joint call for disarmament of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. International security cannot be guaranteed if we fail to accord priority attention and resources to education, protection of the environment and good Heath of humankind and its survival into the next millennium.

As a small island developing State where the ocean provides one of the most important parts of our food chain, we would like to join others in voicing our main concern regarding the management of our oceans and seas. Our participation at the Second London Oceans Workshop last December demonstrated this. We would therefore join other nations in calling for a collective affirmation by all respective Member States at this session of the General Assembly for a resolution to establish a consultative process to improve coordination and management of programmes that are associated with the protection of the oceans and the seas which are very dear to our very survival. This year my Government acceded to and ratified three International Maritime Organization Conventions which again reflects our concern for the protection of our oceans and seas.

The momentum of the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization, and the lessons we have learned from past mistakes and our renewed commitment must guide us in our pursuit for a better world where, through this Organization, a renewed sense of mutual trust and genuine dialogue can be resurrected to ease the political tensions and economic crisis in all the regions and sub-regions of the planet.

Mr. Gambari (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

For our part of the world, these new developments constitute a real threat to the already vulnerable environment of our small island economies and our population. Confronted with these challenges, many countries in the Pacific Region, including Vanuatu, do not have much choice at the end of the century but to embark on difficult programmes of reform, both within their respective Governments and societies.

Last year, The Honourable Donald Kalpokas Masike Vanua, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, informed the Assembly that Vanuatu had initiated a Comprehensive Reform Programme with the support of both multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and countries. As we are still in the implementation stage of our reform, it is our genuine hope that it will not only be beneficial to our people but also responsive to their needs, in particular those of the 80 per cent who live in the rural areas on subsistence farming. Therefore Vanuatu would continue to need the special support being accorded to it as a least developed country.

The role of Mr. Gurirab's predecessor and of the Secretary-General in subsequently facilitating a constructive dialogue and comprehensive appreciation of the economic hardships of Vanuatu must be commended, and it is our hope that this will continue as we enter the new millennium.

In this regard, the Government and the people of Vanuatu warmly welcome the recent decision of the Economic and Social Council, at its recent meeting in Geneva this year, to defer consideration of Vanuatu's graduation from least developed country status, pending full assessment of the usefulness of the vulnerability index and ecological fragility as criteria for least developed country designation.

In this connection, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that with the assistance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), my Government will be carrying out a review of our situation in Vanuatu which we hope will assist the Committee for Development Planning in its endeavour to come up with criteria that will hopefully be accepted and adopted to determine the status of most least developed countries. We would like to register our most sincere appreciation and recognition to each and every country and group of countries for their continuous support.

One of the commitments we all made during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1995 was that our Organization ought to be reformed and restructured in a manner that reflects reality and the problems we are currently experiencing, so that it could be effective in addressing the issues and needs of its Member States, both individually and as a group. On this note, we want to associate ourselves with earlier statements in reference to reform and restructuring, in particular on the issue of geographical location. Here we are referring specifically to our close neighbours, Australia and New Zealand, which are considered as part of the Asia-Pacific region.

From our perspective — shared, we have no doubt, by others — the United Nations must include in its reform agenda a full assessment and recognition of the inherent particularities of small island States like the Republic of Vanuatu and the impact of the international economic crisis, in particular that of globalization, on their economic performance and on the sustainability of their political stability.

The pursuit and promotion of a free and responsible press, the protection of individual rights and gender equality, as noted in Mr. Gurirab's opening remarks, are matters which are receiving more attention under the reform programme. These are real challenges to Vanuatu today, but they are challenges which we are confident we will successfully address over time, with the necessary support of the international community.

The right of self-determination must also continue to occupy our agenda. As the United Nations International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism ends next year, it is my Government's hope that all administering Powers of the countries concerned will take appropriate steps, in cooperation with the territories, to work out some time-frame for those countries to exercise their inalienable right self-determination, self-government or independence. The United Nations, as mandated by its Charter, must be seen to encourage and support dialogue at the appropriate political levels in the regions and countries where human suffering and social disorder continue as a direct result of conflicts of opinion on the issue of self-determination.

In the Pacific region, while we warmly welcomed the signing last year of the Nouméa Accord between the French Government and the major political parties in New Caledonia, we urge all parties concerned to uphold their commitment in relation to the rights and wishes of the indigenous population of New Caledonia. We

welcome the decision by the French Government to allow representatives from the South Pacific Forum and representatives of the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee to visit the Territory in August of this year, as outlined in resolution 53/65. We believe this new agreement and the latest developments will help to foster a stronger sense of commitment in all parties to work together to support an irreversible trend for the future political status of New Caledonia — that is, its self-determination.

Still in our region, while the East Timorese people have finally realized their right to self-determination, my Government notes with grave concern the deteriorating situation in East Timor following the results of the ballot at the end of August in which many human rights violations have been noted and many innocent people have lost their lives. However, my Government is pleased to note the initiatives taken by the Government of Indonesia to allow the deployment of a Security Council peacekeeping force in the troubled area and to assist in restoring normalcy and allowing the democratic process to take its course.

As I said earlier on, the world and our Organization will be going through very challenging times as we prepare to turn the page of this century and start a new one. The credibility of the United Nations in the next millennium will be measured in terms of its effectiveness in responding to the real situations prevailing in its Member States, especially in small island States. The recent admission of our Pacific Island neighbours, namely the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, to this body is a manifestation of this, and we hope that their admission not only increases the membership of the United Nations but also that they will bring with them new ideas to contribute to this important Organization. As small island States, we feel that our problems will be addressed adequately and be heard in an international Organization like the United Nations, and we join others in welcoming them to our family of nations.

To conclude, let me say that it is therefore vital that we all support and supplement the process of reform spearheaded by our Secretary-General, which is aimed not only at streamlining our Organization but also at strengthening it. As we approach the dawn of the new millennium, with its unforeseen challenges, cooperation will no doubt be required between all Members in order that we may discuss and debate our common issues in this very venue.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, His Excellency Mr. Tofik Zulfugarov.

Mr. Zulfugarov (Azerbaijan): Allow me first of all to sincerely congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session and to express confidence that under his skilful leadership the Assembly will cope successfully with the complex issues before it.

I would like also to commend the President of the previous session of the General Assembly, Mr. Didier Opertti, on his remarkable commitment to the success of the session.

I wish also to congratulate and to welcome the new Members of our Organization — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Speaking from this lofty rostrum, representatives of the States Members of the United Nations are trying to communicate to their colleagues and the international community the most pressing problems that their countries face. The truth, which is not always pleasant, is expressed here with hope for justice, understanding and support.

States, including the Republic of Azerbaijan, that have regained their freedom and now face threats to their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, count on the support of the international community. They are also deeply concerned about the current difficulties of the Organization. Member States look to the United Nations with trust and hope. This places on the Organization an important responsibility for finding a way out of the current complex situation.

In this connection, the Republic of Azerbaijan actively supports the United Nations reform process, which our times demand. We believe that a transformed Organization, adapted to modern realities, will be in a position to cope with an increasing number of challenges and risks to international peace and security.

Threats to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the Member States of the United Nations have become appallingly routine. States often face aggression, military occupation, "ethnic cleansing", separatism and terrorism. A conflict that is not dealt with in a timely and resolute manner is later transformed into a humanitarian

disaster that brings about a very sensitive reaction on the part of the international community.

Given the resolute action by the international community in the Balkans, the situation with regard to the unresolved or frozen conflicts in other regions seems especially tragic. We consider it unacceptable to set priorities in this respect, and wish to draw the attention of the international community to the intolerable fact that one fifth of the territory of a sovereign Member State of the United Nations — the Republic of Azerbaijan — has continued to be under foreign occupation for more than six years and that, as a result of "ethnic cleansing", one out of seven of its citizens is a refugee or displaced person in his own country.

The clear trend towards putting up with the behaviour of the aggressor and sometimes even conniving at his attempts to legalize the situation in the conflict zone, as well as the eagerness of some mediators to reach an easy settlement on the basis that the "ethnic cleansing" of the Azerbaijani population and the occupation of its territories is a *fait accompli*, will only lead to continued tension and further delay the prospects for a settlement of the conflict and the restoration of durable peace and stability in the region, based on the norms and principles of international law.

The only valid premise for a lasting settlement of conflicts is a timely display of determination and solidarity by the international community, first and foremost by the United Nations, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, for the protection and observation of the norms and principles of international law and for making every effort to secure the implementation of decisions taken.

Like other countries facing aggression and militant separatism, Azerbaijan rejects settlement models that infringe on its sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of its State and run counter to its national interests. An example is the concept of the common State, which was proposed as a model for settlement in the context of certain conflicts, but failed to find the support of the countries concerned. That concept is pernicious, because it attempts to distort the notion of statehood and State sovereignty; in fact, it is an attempt to provide a legal framework for the ideology of militant separatism.

It goes without saying that an important factor in any settlement is the readiness of the parties involved to find a compromise. At the same time, by definition, compromise implies reciprocity and clear limits. Seeking a realistic formula for a compromise based on adherence to the norms and principles of international law, taking into account national and State interests, the President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, has maintained direct contact and held talks with the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharian. It is Azerbaijan's hope that this approach can open new possibilities to steer the settlement process out of the deadlock that we have witnessed during the past year.

It is now possible to speak about the achievement of a positive climate, which should be complemented with more active work by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which is responsible for the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, so that the negotiation process can be resumed in the near future. We regard it as absolutely unjustified that some members of the Minsk Group use the fact that there are direct contacts between Azerbaijan and Armenia as an excuse for their stepping aside from the process and for their inactivity. In this connection, we call upon the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group to make every effort necessary to bring about in the near future a revised proposal for the settlement of the conflict that would represent an acceptable combination of elements.

It will be necessary effectively to use the time remaining before the OSCE summit in Istanbul in order to come closer to achieving concrete results. It is extremely important that the consistency and determination of the international community be maintained in advocating its declared positions on the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We believe, in particular, that the sequence of steps provided for in the Security Council resolutions on the conflict continues to be optimal.

Azerbaijan reaffirms its commitment to a peaceful settlement and unconditional implementation of the ceasefire until a political agreement on the cessation of the conflict is concluded. Guided by a spirit of goodwill and a sincere desire to reach progress in the settlement process, on 18 September 1999, during the visit of Knut Vollebaek, the Chairman-in-office of the OSCE, the President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, announced the unilateral release of all Armenian prisoners of war held in Azerbaijan. We expect an adequate reaction from the Armenian side in the near future.

Azerbaijan supports the reform process in the Organization, based on the proposals of the

Secretary-General and the decisions of the General Assembly. Reform of the Security Council continues to be the priority problem. Azerbaijan fully agrees with the approach reflected in resolution 53/30, in accordance with which any decisions on this issue would require the positive vote of a minimum of two thirds of the Member States.

We still believe that the representation of the States of Asia, Africa and Latin America in all membership categories of the Security Council should reflect modern political realities. Azerbaijan reconfirms its support for the election of Germany and Japan as permanent members of the Security Council. We continue to believe that, together with that, objective reality calls for the allocation of one additional non-permanent seat to the Eastern European Group.

With regard to the reform and strengthening of the effectiveness of the work of the Security Council, I cannot fail to draw the attention of the Assembly to the fact that the four resolutions adopted by the Security Council on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), have still not been implemented. We believe that the lack of an adequate reaction to the violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter and the non-compliance with decisions adopted within the United Nations is seriously undermining the image of the world Organization.

Azerbaijan welcomes the increased attention of the Security Council to acute humanitarian problems in conflict situations, and supports the inclusion in the mandate of peacekeeping forces of concrete and adequate provisions for the demilitarization of conflict zones and the disarmament of combatants, as well as of special provisions on the protection of and support for the civilian population, including women and children.

Illegal arms transfers to conflict zones make the prospects for settlement more remote and aggravate humanitarian disasters. Recently this has become a pressing problem which requires special attention and specific joint action by the international community. In this context, breaches of the relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions, especially by some of the Council's own members, are unacceptable. Azerbaijan supports convening an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects not later than 2001.

We attach great importance to the timely convening of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which could determine the future course of action in the field of disarmament, arms control and related international security matters.

Azerbaijan stands by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and welcomes its entry into force; we welcome also the outcome of the First Meeting of States Parties, held in Maputo. A national agency in this sphere has been created in Azerbaijan: it has begun its activities and has started to establish cooperation with its international counterparts. Azerbaijan's formal accession to the Convention is directly dependent on the issue of the continuing occupation of its territory by Armenia.

Azerbaijan has a highly positive view of the establishment of the International Criminal Court, and supports the work of the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court on a number of provisions of its Statute. We regard as very important the work being done by the Commission to define the crime of aggression, and believe that the definition should be clear and viable, and that it should make provision for a norm establishing personal criminal responsibility. As a victim of aggression, Azerbaijan maintains that the Court should become an effective organ for the prosecution of those who commit crimes against humanity.

My country is interested in taking an active part in combatting international terrorism, organized crime and illegal drug trafficking. The fight against these evils can be effective only if it is based on joint efforts by all countries, at both the regional and the global levels. We support the idea of convening in 2000 an anti-terrorist conference or a special session of the General Assembly on this issue, and the elaboration of a declaration of principles on the interaction of States in combatting terrorism. We hope that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be able to mobilize additional resources to continue the joint project on drug-abuse control of the UNDP, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme and the Government of Azerbaijan.

Another emerging topical area of activities is the provision of humanitarian relief assistance in emergency situations and periods of natural disasters, such as those that we have witnessed in recent months. In this connection, Azerbaijan calls for increased assistance to the victims of the tragic earthquake in brotherly Turkey, which claimed thousands of human lives.

Despite the objective difficulties caused by the armed conflict and the transitional period, Azerbaijan believes that there is no alternative to its chosen course of reform aimed at building a democratic society with a market economy. As a State located at a key point between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is keenly interested in securing access to trans-European and trans-Asian communication networks; this would facilitate the development of industrial and trade links among participating countries, improved access to markets, increased integration links, and closer cooperation among the economies of European and Asian countries.

Unfortunately, the process of the profound transformation of the national economy is facing the serious consequences of the presence in the country of 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Coping with this emergency situation has been a primary concern of the Azerbaijan State for many years. Given the limited financial resources of our State, humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and other international organizations is a necessary element not only of the physical, but also of the moral survival of people who have lost their homes. We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the United Nations, to the relevant United Nations agencies and to donor countries providing humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan, and we call upon them not to reduce the volume of that assistance.

Allow me to touch briefly upon the role that the United Nations and its agencies are playing in Azerbaijan. At the last session, I spoke about the constructive work being done with respect to the social and economic development of our country by the United Nations Development Programme. The UNDP is actively assisting the Government of Azerbaijan and bilateral and multilateral humanitarian organizations in addressing development issues. At the same time, my Government is deeply concerned at the fact that UNDP is entering the new millennium with an extremely decreased financial base. We all need a UNDP able to cope with the development problems that we are not in a position to solve alone. All participants in this process — donors and recipients of assistance — should provide sincere and solid support to the development activities of the United Nations.

In this context, I would like to call upon all concerned to improve significantly the very difficult current financial situation of the Organization.

With reference to relations between my country and the United Nations in general, I would like again to draw attention to the fact that Azerbaijan is still not represented in the United Nations Secretariat.

The world is tired of crises and wars. Mankind deserves a peaceful, prosperous and happy new millennium. Our Organization is designed to play a leading role in overcoming obstacles to global peace and progress. It must be in a position to implement that noble mission. This is not an abstract desire, but a realistic task based on an assessment of the situation and an awareness of both needs and possibilities.

The Acting President: I call now on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed.

Mr. Ould Sid Ahmed (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I am convinced that his experience and his wisdom will enable him to guide the work of the session to a successful conclusion. My delegation assures him of its complete cooperation in that noble task.

I take this opportunity also to express my thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the distinguished manner in which he has conducted the session just concluded.

I would also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts in reforming and restructuring the Organization, and in improving its functioning and strengthening its role in all areas so that it can adapt to the requirements and challenges of the day. In this regard, we welcome the valuable report on the work of the Organization that he presented at the beginning of these proceedings.

Mauritania welcomes the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to the membership of our Organization. We would like to express our readiness to work with them to achieve the objectives of the United Nations.

We have to undertake immediately the reform of the United Nations and the restructuring of its organs in order to serve the world's common interests. No one can deny that the circumstances in which the Organization was founded more than 50 years ago have changed a

great deal, and that important new changes have occurred in all areas since then. This only makes a re-examination of the structures and working methods of the Organization more imperative. It is in this spirit that my delegation supports the expansion of representation in the Security Council in accordance with the principles of democracy, transparency and equity in order to ensure equitable geographical representation in that body, and to reflect the universal nature of our Organization, as laid down in the Charter.

As we meet at the threshold of the third millennium, a large portion of humanity still lives in conditions that do not enable people to satisfy their legitimate hopes and aspirations to live in a world where peace, justice and well-being reign. In spite of some encouraging indicators in certain developing countries, the general tendency is that of a widening gap between developed and developing countries. The latter are going through profound changes over which they have no control, affected by, among other things, their debt burden, deterioration of commodity prices, poor access to international markets and weakness of foreign investment. This situation should alert the Organization of the need not to limit its actions to the traditional maintenance of international peace and security. The situation calls for the Organization to strive to lighten the heavy burden under which the developing countries languish in the economic and social fields. The United Nations must also help these countries step up the pace of their economic growth. In this regard, donor countries should increase their official development assistance, increase their foreign investment and open up their markets to the products of developing countries in order to help bring about a new world order based on dialogue, cooperation and solidarity.

In this context, and since debt constitutes a burden that the developing countries are incapable of bearing, it is imperative to give the question of debt the attention it deserves. We express the hope that initiatives taken to help the most heavily indebted poor countries will make it possible to eliminate the obstacles that are neutralizing and frustrating their development efforts.

Today the world faces many troublesome situations, the consequences of which are felt beyond the frontiers of the countries immediately involved. Such situations threaten security, nationally, regionally and internationally, and call into question the progress achieved towards economic and social development. We are required to find proper solutions for such problems. By way of example, I would mention terrorism, human rights violations and poverty.

In this regard, my country reiterates its condemnation of terrorism, whatever its origin and form. It calls on the international community to strengthen cooperation and dialogue in order to combat this phenomenon with determination and firmness.

Last year the General Assembly commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which coincided with the fifth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. That was an opportunity to evaluate the results of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the remaining obstacles in this area, and to identify necessary measures for the full implementation of the recommendations that the World Conference on Human Rights had adopted and that my country is striving to translate into reality.

We should also mention the special session on population and development held by the General Assembly in this very Hall at the end of last June at which the Programme of Action of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development was reaffirmed. We hope that the results of that meeting will help improve the standard of living of all peoples and will help bring about sustainable development thanks to the strengthening of the correlation between questions of population and those of development. In this area, I would like to point out that my country has stepped up its efforts to promote the status of women and to combat illiteracy in all its forms, and it has produced programmes with beneficial effects for the family, for children in particular and for society in general.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania has adopted a foreign policy based on immutable principles of promoting good-neighbourly relations, peaceful coexistence and the enhancement of regional and international cooperation. On the basis of these principles, my country attaches particular importance to strengthening stability and to containing the numerous sources of tension throughout the world, which are likely to jeopardize international peace and security and compromise the development efforts of nations.

While reaffirming its whole-hearted support for the peace process, my country believes that no just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be brought about in the Middle East without the application of the principle of land for peace as agreed at the Madrid Conference, and the comprehensive implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425

(1978), which guarantee Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, as well as from the Syrian Golan Heights, southern Lebanon and West Bekaa, and the restoration to the Palestinian people of all their legitimate rights, first and foremost their right to self-determination and to the creation of their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Today, as we embark on a new era, the international community is looking forward to reviving the peace process and to restoring it to its proper track. In this regard, we believe that a resumption of negotiations on all tracks between all parties concerned is a most urgent measure. We therefore invite the two sponsors of the peace process to shoulder their responsibilities and to exert greater efforts to preserve the opportunity of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in this region.

In the Gulf region, we hope to see a combination of regional and international efforts that would restore stability and concord to the region. In this regard, my country reaffirms its commitment to and respect for international legality and the resolutions of the United Nations, and repeats its rejection of anything that may be prejudicial to the independence and the territorial integrity of Kuwait.

We also reaffirm our repudiation of any measure likely to threaten the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. We call for lifting the embargo that for eight years now has been inflicted on the Iraqi people, who have suffered enormously, especially children, women and the elderly.

In the Maghreb region, my country is working together with its brothers in the Arab Maghreb Union to establish cooperation and dialogue in order to fulfil the aspirations of the peoples of the region.

As regards the Western Sahara, my country welcomes the positive steps taken towards the implementation of the United Nations plan to resolve the dispute. We reaffirm our readiness to do everything in our power to promote the implementation of this plan.

With regard to the Lockerbie incident, my country welcomes the efforts undertaken to achieve a final settlement of this question, including the suspension of the sanctions imposed against the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Although we are pleased by the success of certain diplomatic démarches, we nevertheless feel that it is time for the Security Council to take the necessary steps to lift this embargo once and for all.

As regards Guinea-Bissau, my country welcomes the settlement that was achieved within the framework of the Abuja and Lomé Agreements, and we support the transitional Government. In particular, we support the implementation of commitments entered into at the Geneva round table and aimed at organizing pluralistic elections and at the reconstruction of the country.

Furthermore, while expressing our profound concern about the persistence of conflict in Somalia, we hope that our Somali brothers will engage in constructive dialogue and in a spirit of responsibility and patriotism so that a peaceful settlement can be reached and Somalia will again be united and will regain its national sovereignty in an atmosphere of stability and concord.

My country also welcomes the Peace Agreement reached between the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, and fervently calls for stability and reconciliation in that country, which suffered tremendously during eight years of devastating war.

My country also notes with satisfaction the gradual return of peace to the Republic of the Congo and urges our Congolese brothers to continue their negotiations, with a view to bringing about a peaceful settlement of their dispute so that that fraternal country can once again live in peace and harmony.

As regards the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we welcome the diplomatic efforts of the fraternal countries of the region, in particular South Africa and Zambia, as well as the important role played by the leader of the Libyan revolution, Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi, in containing the crisis. In this regard, we welcome the signing of the Lusaka Agreement.

As to Angola, my country expresses its profound regret at the resumption of fighting between the Government forces and the UNITA movement. In this regard, we reaffirm our wholehearted support for Security Council resolutions 864 (1993), 1127 (1997) and 1173 (1998) and urge UNITA to respect the obligations it entered into under the Lusaka Protocol to restore peace and security.

On the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, we urge the two parties to respect the ceasefire and to try to find a peaceful settlement, on the basis of the plan of the Organization of African Unity. In this context, we place great hope in the good-offices mission of Mr. Abdelaziz

Bouteflika, current Chairman of the OAU, to bring about a peaceful and equitable settlement of the conflict.

On Kosovo, my country notes with satisfaction the progress achieved in putting an end to the violence, restoring confidence and reconstructing what was destroyed over the long period of war.

The United Nations was created in order to achieve objectives shared by all humanity: the maintenance of peace, security and stability throughout the world. The letter and the spirit of the Charter of our Organization provide for a just balance between the rights and obligations of all and aim at achieving these common interests of the international community. Therefore, today, as we are about to enter the third millennium, we are duty-bound to devote our efforts to honouring the commitments laid down in the Charter and to work together to build a new world order based on justice and directed towards preserving international peace and security.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Marketing of Dominica, His Excellency The Honourable Norris Charles.

Mr. Charles (Dominica): I am honoured to be afforded this opportunity to extend my delegation's congratulations to Mr. Gurirab and his country, Namibia, on his election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. His considerable diplomatic experience is well known, and there is little doubt that the affairs of this session will be conducted with expeditiousness, skill and competence. At the same time, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation and gratitude to his immediate predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the able manner in which he presided over the fifty-third session.

Let me extend my delegation's thanks to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the excellent and exemplary leadership qualities he has displayed during this critical period for the United Nations and the international community. The Commonwealth of Dominica welcomes and congratulates the three new Member States — Kiribati, Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga — on their admission to the United Nations. We pledge to work with them on matters of mutual interest.

I take this opportunity to convey my country's deepest condolences to the Governments and the people of the Bahamas and the United States for the loss of life and destruction of property caused by hurricane Floyd. I also express my Government's sentiments regarding the victims of the earthquakes in Greece, the Republic of China on Taiwan, Turkey, and, just recently, Mexico. Our sympathy is also extended to the victims of the nuclear accident in Japan.

The Commonwealth of Dominica is supportive of the ongoing United Nations reform programme, the intent of which is to create a system geared to eliminating waste and duplication and making more efficient use of the Organization's resources. At its creation the United Nations was charged with responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and the numerous United Nations missions currently in place around the globe are testimony to the Organization's efforts to meet its Charter obligations in this regard. However, we continue to maintain that the restructuring and revitalization process should result in creating an Organization with the capacity, compassion and effectiveness to meet the many serious economic, social and humanitarian problems confronting the majority of citizens in the global village.

We are not unmindful of the great contributions that the United Nations system has made to the improvement of health, the eradication of diseases and the rising levels of education and living standards in various parts of the world. Additionally, the United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to focus international consciousness on human rights abuses, while it continues to be the last hope for the many thousands displaced each year as a result of political, religious or ethnic conflict.

But poverty eradication remains an unfulfilled promise. Today, increasing numbers of people live in conditions of poverty, with no access to adequate medical care, basic education or even clean drinking water. We recognize that poverty eradication is a task to be undertaken not by the United Nations system alone, but in partnership with the international community, which must come to the realization that improvement in social and economic conditions is less costly than having to deal with the consequences of sustained economic deprivation and social degradation. The time for engaging in that partnership is now.

As for the reform of the Security Council, the Commonwealth of Dominica supports the work of the Open-ended Working Group and its efforts at reconciling the many outstanding issues and differences among Member States. We believe that any meaningful reform of the Security Council should reflect present-day

economic and geographical realities and must provide for a reasonable expansion of its membership and equitable representation for regional groupings, with no differentiation regarding the rights of permanent members.

The Commonwealth of Dominica applauded the decision of the people of East Timor, as expressed in the popular consultation of 30 August 1999. We must therefore deplore and condemn the acts of violence visited upon the people of East Timor by those determined to nullify the results of the consultation and maintain the colonial status quo. We commend the United Nations for its work in making the consultation possible and we strongly support the decision of the Security Council to authorize the establishment of a multinational peacekeeping force to protect the people of East Timor as they seek to assert their right to self-determination.

The Commonwealth of Dominica wishes to address once again the issue of legitimate representation for the Republic of China on Taiwan and its people in the United Nations. The Republic of China on Taiwan, a model of democracy in the Asian region, is able and willing to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations. Over the past few decades, the Republic of China has made tremendous strides in economic development, thus enabling it to make a contribution to poverty alleviation through economic assistance programmes in developing countries. Dominica is concerned that an industrialized country, with a democratically elected Government, that exercises sovereign authority over a defined geographical area with a population of 22 million people, is denied membership of the United Nations. This situation must be addressed in order to ensure that the citizens of the Republic of China on Taiwan have a representative voice in the United Nations and its related agencies.

The recently concluded special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States provided an opportunity to review the 1994 Barbados Plan of Action. The recognition of small island developing States in that regard is a significant milestone in the history of the United Nations. The follow-up action and the importance which the international community places on the implementation of the many proposals and recommendations will serve to determine not only the success of the special session, but also the credibility of the United Nations and the usefulness of these conferences.

As a small island developing State which has always recognized the importance of conservation of the environment, Dominica made a commitment at the Rio Summit to vigorously pursue sustainable development. Two years later, Dominica participated in the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados and has tried at the national level to implement the Plan of Action within the limits of our resources.

The Barbados Plan of Action recognizes the importance of coastal and marine resources to the sustainable development of small island developing States. The Commonwealth of Dominica is acutely aware of that importance. Prudent use of our coastal and marine resources over many years has contributed immensely to the economic well-being and sustenance of our citizens. Moreover, the successful implementation of our eco-tourism development programme relies heavily on the maintenance and preservation of the marine and biological resources present in the seas around our island State. Those resources are under constant and serious threat from a number of sources, such as illegal waste-dumping with impunity by foreign-owned ocean liners; overfishing by non-indigenous fishing fleets; and the use of the Caribbean Sea for the transshipment of nuclear waste and other hazardous substances.

The Commonwealth of Dominica, together with other members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), continues to view the dangerous practice of the transshipment of nuclear waste and hazardous substances through the Caribbean Sea as a potentially serious threat to the fragile ecosystem and to the livelihood and well-being of the people of the region, and we call upon the States engaging in that practice to demonstrate some regard for our justifiable concerns. We earnestly seek the support of the international community in our ongoing effort to halt the shipment of these dangerous materials through the Caribbean Sea. Further, members of CARICOM call upon the General Assembly to recognize the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development and urge the international community to support the concept and its development.

The Commonwealth of Dominica is appreciative of the United Nations for paying special attention to the issue of small island developing States at the special session of the General Assembly. One sincerely hopes that this same recognition and support will be in evidence during the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference later this year, when small island developing

States seek to address their particular concerns and circumstances.

The Commonwealth of Dominica, like most small vulnerable States, faces increasing challenges from globalization; particularly in the area of multilateral trade negotiations. Due to resource constraints, developing countries are having difficulties in meeting the commitments which they made at the Uruguay Round. Yet we are on the eve of making further commitments at the new round of WTO negotiations to be launched in Seattle in December. The negotiating process itself exposes developing countries to the growing disparities of the multilateral trading system. We run the risk of developing countries being further marginalized unless these negotiations give full recognition to their special circumstances, and in particular to those of small vulnerable economies. Small vulnerable economies will continue to require differential treatment for some time as a means of facilitating their integration into the world economy.

My country's experien . with the WTO has not been a positive one. The economy of Dominica and those of the other Caribbean banana-producing countries are heavily dependent for their export earnings on this single crop. The WTO banana ruling has contributed to a significant decline in our banana exports. Our bananas are cultivated by small farmers whose main source of income could be wiped out as a result of the WTO ruling, resulting in increased unemployment and poverty in the rural areas.

We need to find a solution to the banana dispute that will allow our farmers to continue to earn a living. There is a growing recognition of the need for a tariff rate quota as the most acceptable solution. However, the North American multinational banana companies are insisting on a simple tariff, which will ultimately lead to the demise of the small banana producers in the Caribbean and other African, Caribbean and Pacific States. We continue to receive assurances that it is not the intention of our neighbours to the North to hurt the Caribbean producers, but their actions indicate otherwise. Moreover, they insist on applying a strict interpretation to the multilateral trading rules, which displays a callous disregard of the plight of small banana farmers. The rules of the WTO must not be applied in a manner which is detrimental to the development process of small vulnerable States.

My focus on issues presently facing the region would be incomplete without a brief but sincere appeal to this body to address the plight of the citizens of our sister island Cuba. As we progress to a new century, the United Nations must continue to condemn the prolonged economic blockade of Cuba.

This unjustifiable action is unconscionable, unreasonable and a direct infringement on the rights of the people of Cuba to pursue a peaceful existence, economic prosperity and self-determination. Dominica therefore joins other members of the international community in calling for an end to this blockade. We should all seek more amicable methods of settling bilateral disputes.

As a nation preparing to celebrate its twenty-first anniversary of independence on 3 November 1999, Dominica will continue to equip itself and its citizens to meet the challenges of the global environment and the new millennium. The Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica has endeavoured to ensure that its policies and programmes continue to provide the leadership, institutions and infrastructure necessary to attain that goal.

The President returned to the Chair.

Strengthened by our rich cultural heritage, as manifested in our Creole music, dance and other forms of expression, we are convinced that the world would be a safer and better place if the people of the world learned to respect and tolerate each other's culture, religion and traditions.

It is in this spirit that Dominica reaffirms its commitment to the ideals of the United Nations and pledges to do all in its power to support the efforts of all States, particularly those of the vulnerable small island developing States. The challenges facing Dominica are many, but I am confident that with the support of all Member States and with the help of God we shall prevail.

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin.

Mr. Mesfin (Ethiopia): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, it is with great satisfaction that I wish to extend to you, Sir, our congratulations on your well-deserved election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, which is coinciding with the end of a momentous century. It is indeed a source of immense pleasure and pride to my delegation and myself to see you presiding over this forum where you, as the representative here of the South West Africa

People's Organization for many years, waged an unrelenting struggle for the independence of your country, Namibia, which was crowned with success in 1990. Your assumption of this high office is a fitting tribute to the struggle of the many sons and daughters of Africa over the years for the total emancipation of Africa from colonial rule. I wish to assure you of the fullest cooperation of my delegation in the discharge of the heavy responsibilities entrusted to you. I wish also to seize this opportunity to convey to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, our appreciation for a job well done, and we salute him for all the efforts he has made.

I should also like to welcome the new Members of our Organization: the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Kiribati.

To our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for whom my country has great esteem, I wish to renew our friendship and to reiterate how much we have always appreciated his wisdom and his vision. His being at the helm of the world body is indeed one of the few consolations for Africa, a continent which otherwise has little voice within the Organization.

This annual occasion, here at this forum, affords us a unique opportunity to express our views as Member States on issues that are of concern to us as members of the human family, as part of specific regions of the world and in our capacity as nations. The 170 items on the Assembly's agenda at this session are clear testimony to the range of issues confronting the international community as we approach the coming millennium. It is not, however, always easy to separate these various levels of concern. They are obviously interconnected, and all the more so for countries such as Ethiopia, whose fates are affected, positively or negatively, by what takes place internationally and by what the United Nations does and does not do.

It goes without saying that developing countries in general, and the least developed countries in particular, as a group, face the most serious problems in all areas of international life. Problems of poverty, underdevelopment and the debt burden are among the multifarious problems the developing countries are grappling with today. As a least developed country, Ethiopia has its own share of these problems, the magnitude of which is all too obvious, even as we are making a determined effort to overcome them.

In this statement I will not try to go into all the problems facing developing countries today. Instead, I should like to focus on one issue: collective security, especially in relation to its impact on developing countries, those in Africa in particular, and how the United Nations has failed them in this critical area. For Ethiopia this is all the more justified and timely inasmuch as we have been the victim of aggression — not for the first time in our history — for over a year now.

The United Nations has been important to us, and the promise contained in its Charter to be our collective instrument for international peace and security and a vehicle for international cooperation in all areas of human endeavour has been a source of hope. But we in Ethiopia are not so sure that the hope we have is always justified, both as Africans and as Ethiopians.

From the vantage point of Africa, it is indeed difficult to assert with confidence that the Organization is also ours. This must also apply to the rest of the developing world. But the African case is unique. Whether it is in the area of economic cooperation or with respect to peace and security, our continent continues to be a region of the world which is the least favoured for effective and meaningful cooperation. The "We the peoples of the United Nations" mentioned in the Preamble to the Charter and the lofty aspirations contained therein continue to be distant dreams for Africa.

This might be regarded by some as an exaggerated claim and an attempt to shift the blame for a predicament which is of Africa's own making and therefore a harsh judgment on the performance of the United Nations. We in Ethiopia would be the first to acknowledge the critical value for us of the very many types of cooperation we have with the United Nations and its various agencies, some of which have indeed been very effective. It would be unfair to the Organization and to many of its dedicated staff for us to fail to acknowledge this.

In this regard, a balanced evaluation of the performance of the United Nations cannot fail to take note of the good work being done by the Organization in the economic, social and humanitarian areas. This is apart from the indispensable role that the United Nations and its various agencies, most particularly its specialized agencies, play in harmonizing the activities of nations in various critical spheres.

It is also true that Africa and, in particular, some of its individual countries, appear to have a unique way of ensuring that available opportunities are missed for making progress for peace and development. But still the

African condition can hardly be explained only in terms of omission or commission by the people of the continent. It would suffice to refer to the cold war and to the super-Power rivalry spawned by that episode and to the havoc wrought by it in Africa to be reminded that Africa's pains are not always of its own making.

Whatever the causes for Africa's predicament, however, the spirit of common destiny, interdependence and the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations should have obliged the international community to be more forthcoming in rendering effective cooperation to regions such as Africa so that they can overcome the obstacles to development faced by their peoples.

The fact that there is no international cooperation at present in the spirit of the United Nations Charter is nowhere more evident than in the circumstances surrounding the debt burden, which continues to remain the most critical factor hindering development and the alleviation of poverty. There have so far been no effective steps taken internationally to alleviate this scourge, and there is no visible remedy on the horizon. This is a telling testimony to how much the promise contained in the Charter about international cooperation has remained an empty slogan. If our vision for the United Nations for the century we are entering does not incorporate a remedy to this danger, then for the bulk of humanity the Organization is bound to be more irrelevant than it is today.

It is not only that the United Nations is about to enter the next century with little to show in bringing about genuine international cooperation for combating poverty. Even more worrying is that it is going to do so with its credibility very much in tatters with regard to its collective security system, which at present commands little trust as a collective instrument of the international community for world peace and security.

Whether during the cold war or since it, in this area the United Nations, more often than not, has remained a custodian not of the collective security interests of the people of the world, but of the special security interests of those who count. Here is where double standards abound, even with respect to the defense of some sacrosanct principles of international law.

Africa can hardly be proud of the way it has handled even the very little opportunity it has had for establishing durable peace and security in the continent. Even after having granted that the difficult socio-economic conditions of the region have been the major causes for the African dilemma in this area, the fact still remains that bad governance, mismanagement of resources, lack of tolerance for diversity and human rights violations have indeed fuelled some of the conflicts in our continent. Therefore we cannot absolve ourselves fully from taking part of the blame. In the final analysis, we have to find our own solution to these problems.

But, on the other hand, the fact remains that Africa has received little effective international cooperation, in particular from the United Nations, for sorting out its difficulties in the area of peace and security. Conflicts in Africa have had the fate of either being neglected or, when not neglected, being judged and handled by different standards. Let me give a couple of illustrations.

The genocide in Rwanda is a source of shame for Africa, but it was also a reminder of the double standards to which Africa has been subjected. The fact that Somalia and its people have been left to their own devices, regardless of the consequences for the people of Somalia and for the peace and stability of their neighbours, is yet another indication of the types of conflicts which elicit, or fail to elicit, the serious concern of those who count for galvanizing the efforts of the United Nations for action to discharge its responsibilities for collective security. Why should it matter to those who set the agenda for what the Security Council does if the chaos in Somalia becomes a breeding ground for terrorism, as long as the threat is limited only to those who have little voice in the Security Council?

The conflict in Somalia is indeed complex, but it is no more complex than other conflicts in other parts of the world. Somalia is in turmoil and has been for the last nine years, not because the crisis is intractable, but because Somalia is neglected. That country has failed to be on the top of the United Nations agenda, not because it has no legitimate claim to be a priority for the United Nations collective security system, but because the interests of those who count are not affected. This also applies more or less to Angola and Sierra Leone, and earlier to Liberia.

In short, the United Nations has failed Africa, and now stands, one foot into the next century, with this record. In connection with Somalia, I should like to state that Ethiopia, the country mandated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to follow up and assist in resolving the crisis in Somalia, fully supports the initiatives expounded by Mr. Ismail Omar Guelleh, President of the Republic of Djibouti from this rostrum

last week in his capacity as current Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

The experience of my own country over the last year and a half and more speaks volumes about how the United Nations can fail an African country deemed to have no option other than submit to unjust decisions by the powerful. In effect, what the United Nations said to Ethiopia was that Article 51 of the Charter, which provides for the inherent right of sovereign nations to self-defence, did not apply to poor nations such as Ethiopia. That has been our experience in our attempts to ensure the peaceful resolution of the Ethiopian-Eritrean crisis caused by the unprovoked Eritrean aggression against us.

Until May 1998, Ethiopia was nurturing the peace that it had finally achieved after decades of turmoil. The Eritrean problem — one of the sources of instability for Ethiopia — was settled, with Ethiopia leading the way in recognizing the new nation of Eritrea. Ethiopia became a bulwark of peace in our subregion — a fact which was recognized by many. By demobilizing half a million troops and allocating the barest minimum from its budget — less than 2 per cent of its gross domestic product — to defence, the country was making it clear in its actions that poor nations have time to wage war only against their principal enemy, poverty — poverty and backwardness.

The new orientation of the country did produce dividends, most of all in terms of economic growth: average GDP growth of over 7 per cent per year was achieved, after a difficult period of transition. But then, tragedy struck and we fell victim to Eritrean aggression. The unprovoked aggression against us by Eritrea in May 1998 taught us the lesson that peace is not always achieved by the unilateral decision of nations so long as there are rogue States that worship the gun and with leaders who have no domestic limitations on the power they exercise or on the decisions they make.

Eritrea has become a source of tragedy not only for Ethiopia but also for its own people and for the countries of the subregion. No sooner had it achieved formal independence, in 1993, than it provoked a fight with the Sudan, to be followed by an unprovoked onslaught on Yemen in November 1995. Continuing the same pattern of lawlessness, in 1996 Eritrea again went ahead and claimed, by use of force, part of Djibouti's territory — a reckless attempt which was defused in time, thanks also to efforts by Ethiopia.

The Eritrean aggression against Ethiopia in May 1998 was therefore part of the same vivid pattern of behaviour as before, behaviour which has now made the country a major source of instability for our subregion, particularly in Somalia, where Eritrea's destructive activities have caused even more havoc in a nation with no functioning State at all. Thus, consistent with its ignoble motive of exploiting the anarchy and lawlessness in Somalia to advance its irresponsible policy of destabilizing the countries in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea is actively collaborating with the warlords in Somalia by arming and training them and financing their fratricidal conflict, thereby exacerbating the already volatile and unclear state of affairs in the country with all the attendant adverse consequences for peace and stability in our subregion.

Ever since the onset of the Eritrean aggression against Ethiopia, people have been asking how one of the youngest and poorest nations on earth, whose people have barely emerged from the trauma of a protracted liberation struggle, can have the capacity to embark upon one of the most destructive campaigns of destabilization the entire Horn of Africa subregion — or even the whole of Africa for that matter — has ever seen. Over and above the question of Eritrea's capacity, people have been wondering what the motive can be that is driving such acts on the part of a new Member of the family of nations, acts with serious implications for peace and security in our region.

The answer to these questions is not difficult to find. To be a destructive force among nations does not require any special capacity or resources. Small States can create havoc and make life difficult for the international community just as large States can. In fact, an extremist group on the fringes of international life, with no elaborate organizational structure, can without much effort succeed in destabilizing an entire region let alone a vulnerable subregion like ours. In effect, it does not seem as if it requires any special capacity to be a rogue State. Rogue States as such are not born, they become so of their own volition.

That is what we see in Eritrea today: the Eritrean Government is now working hand in glove not only with disgruntled groups in our subregion but also with international terrorists, training, financing and giving them all-round support in their ultimate objective of destabilizing the States of the subregion. We do not believe the source of this Eritrean behaviour is external. It is internal: it emanates from the nature of the domestic

political structure in that country. If the domestic political process in a country has no constraining factors to speak of on its leadership, this, sooner or later, is bound to have a negative impact on the peace and security of the States of that subregion.

In Eritrea this phenomenon is clearly visible today. A total absence of domestic institutions necessary for a normal State, the lack of accountability on the part of the leadership, the non-existence of even a semblance of checks and balances — in effect the absence of a constitutional order — are the distinguishing features of Eritrea today. Pluralism, freedom of association and expression, the right to express dissent — are unknown in Eritrea. Democratic elections are, of course, unheard of there. In fact, Eritrea has nothing to do with the international community in terms of observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms and good governance since it is, for all practical purposes, ruled by the whims of one man. The net effect of these domestic political characteristics and their impact on peace and security in our subregion is that more than any other people it is, in the final analysis, the Eritrean people that are suffering most, bearing the brunt of the hardship resulting from their Government's destabilizing policies and adventures in the Horn of Africa.

No one who has closely followed this tragedy visited on Ethiopia by the Eritrean leadership can be unaware of how much effort Ethiopia has made, for over nine months, to ensure the reversal of the Eritrean aggression through peaceful means. But it was to no avail. And, most regrettably, the United Nations failed us. In contrast, I should like to express my Government's admiration and gratitude for the commendable stand taken by OAU and Africa throughout the crisis in defence of the principles on which this Organization was founded.

However, despite the efforts of the OAU, Eritrea did not listen. The United Nations pretended, even though it knew better, that there had been no aggression. The Security Council went even further, as did some in the international community, in a coordinated effort to punish the victim of aggression, without so much as a word about the aggression or about the gross violations of international law committed by a country known to have developed the habit of acting in a lawless manner.

The members of the Security Council knew full well right from the outset that Eritrea had committed a naked and unprovoked act of aggression against Ethiopia. Yet they chose to characterize a blatant violation of a fundamental principle of international law as a mere border dispute. This, to say the least, is an evasion of the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security. It clearly signified a failure on the part of the Council to uphold the most hallowed principle of international law, namely, the prohibition of the use of force in international relations, except in self-defence. It is a negation of the very concept of collective security in which all States, big and small, placed their confidence when they subscribed to the Charter of the United Nations.

As if to underscore its failure to uphold the international rule of law, the Security Council, in its very first resolution on the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, adopted on 26 June 1998, demanded an immediate ceasefire, in effect rewarding aggression. What better demonstration could there be of the Council's failure to take a determined stand against aggression by demanding that it be reversed before calling for a ceasefire? What better incentive could there be for aggressors like Eritrea to continue with their aggression and reap even more fruits from their wanton acts?

Even more disheartening and gratuitous was the statement issued on 23 June 1999 by the Security Council reminding us of "our primary responsibility to feed our peoples", as if poor nations did not have the right to defend their sovereignty. Or was it meant to imply that the very notion of sovereignty is of no consequence at all for a poor country like Ethiopia? That, history will recall, was what the League of Nations told us, if not in so many words, more than 60 years ago. But this was not what we expected from the United Nations today.

To make matters worse, the Security Council chose, on 10 February 1999, through resolution 1227 (1999), to urge States to end sales of arms both to the aggressor and to the victim, while at the same time continuing to deliberate on how the peace proposal submitted by the Organization of African Unity, and already accepted by Ethiopia, could be modified to make it acceptable to the aggressor at the expense of the victim.

This was again the essence of the informal deliberations by the Security Council on 24 February 1999. The aggressor country was in effect told to wait until the victim of aggression gave in to pressure.

The refusal by a poor nation to accept insult, a nation which happened to be the victim of aggression, obviously entails certain consequences. The punishment

meted out has had almost no limits. It has included financial institutions changing the rules of the game in midstream. In the case of Ethiopia, they saw fit to abrogate ongoing programmes based on non-technical considerations that had absolutely nothing to do with the results of actual performance evaluations. That has been the experience of Ethiopia with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which suspended its cooperation with Ethiopia on political grounds, although it knew full well that it had absolutely no cause for that action on the basis of the relevant criteria.

Once the tone was set by the Security Council, others found it easy to overlook the injustice involved and added their weight to a stance which made a mockery of elementary justice. The European Union and other institutions and countries jumped on the bandwagon, making it clear to Ethiopia that a poor nation is not entitled to defend itself and that not heeding this warning would have its consequences. And it did. Ethiopia's fault was one and only one, and that was its insistence that aggression cannot and must not be rewarded through the use of whatever pretext, including calls for an unconditional ceasefire, which was demanded by the aggressor and thought to be in accord with the interests of those who count. The sovereign rights of the victim did not count. That was the implication for our whole region of the lawless Eritrean philosophy of grabbing land first and then inviting the victims for talks.

I should not, however, give the impression that everybody has been inconsiderate to my country in its hour of need. Indeed, there are countries and institutions that duly value partnership in development which stood by us, realizing that discontinuing development assistance to the victim of aggression would be tantamount to rewarding that aggression. Those countries have not only continued their assistance but also, in some cases, increased it. On behalf of the people of Ethiopia, I should like to express our deep gratitude to those countries and institutions, whose demonstration of solidarity we will always cherish.

In the light of this experience, it is indeed difficult to keep intact our trust in the United Nations and in international cooperation. It is also difficult to have faith in the efficacy of the United Nations collective security system.

The United Nations cannot avoid sharing the blame for the bloodshed and destruction that followed the nine-month Eritrean intransigence. The Ethiopian-Eritrean crisis eventually led to major fighting, not only because the aggressor was intransigent and refused to give peace a chance, but also because the United Nations failed to speak in defence of principles of international law.

With respect to the aggression against Ethiopia by Eritrea, it is the justified feeling of the Ethiopian people that the failure of the United Nations to stand up for its principles is indeed comparable to the injustice done to my country by the League of Nations in 1936.

But this episode has wider implications over and above Ethiopia. It raises a fundamental question with regard to the ability of the United Nations to be a guardian of the principles of international law — a guardianship which would have no financial implications when limited to a mere affirmation of principles. The United Nations has shown us that it cannot even do this. Why this should be so calls for a response, which, if given with candour, should invite drastic measures so that we can have a United Nations which provides a home to all in equal measure.

As for Ethiopia's commitment to peace, that cannot be questioned, as has been made clear consistently since Eritrea's aggression. Ethiopia's position has always been consistent. Aggression, we have said, cannot be rewarded. Peace requires its reversal. That is what every nation would have demanded if it had found itself in Ethiopia's position. Ethiopia has asked for nothing more.

Eritrea now says it is prepared to do what it could have done a year and half ago — something that the United Nations never dared to ask it to do. While this in itself is Ethiopia's vindication, experience has nonetheless taught us a lesson: we must ensure that there are no loopholes in any agreement reached on the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopian territory occupied by force. This is the nature of the ongoing dialogue we are now engaged in with the OAU. There is absolutely no reason why it should be difficult to address the legitimate concerns of the victim of aggression with regard to the clarity of the commitments undertaken by the aggressor country.

Indeed, the principles involved should be protected in the interests not only of Ethiopia but also of our subregion and beyond. The lawlessness and contempt for the principles of international law demonstrated by Eritrea, which have now poisoned the whole region, must be contained. This can be done at the minimum by sending a clear message to its leadership that enough is enough and that aggression should not pay. This is all the more necessary with respect to those who, in the absence

of even a semblance of institutions of governance in the country, are above the law and have little accountability. That is why we have insisted, and continue to insist, that Eritrea must be allowed to gain nothing from its lawlessness. That is why we have insisted, and continue to insist — not without sacrifice — that there should be no loopholes in agreements concluded so that the principle that aggression should not be rewarded is underlined clearly and with no ambiguity. We thus remain hopeful — hoping against hope — that Ethiopia's concerns will be addressed adequately, thereby making it easier to put behind us the nightmare created by the Eritrean aggression.

The United Nations is at a crossroads. It cannot limp along and enter the next century with all its weaknesses unattended. Reforms are necessary. The Security Council cannot remain as it is, unrepresentative and unresponsive to the interests of the majority. It is still not too late to restore confidence in the collective security system envisioned in the Charter of our Organization more than half a century ago. The credibility of the United Nations needs to be revived. How can the United Nations command the trust of all Member States and their peoples? That is one of the questions with which the United Nations will have to grapple as we enter the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea, His Excellency Mr. Haile Weldensae.

Mr. Weldensae (Eritrea): Allow me at the outset to join with others who have spoken before me in congratulating you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I am certain that your experience and skills, as well as your dedication to freedom and justice, make you qualified to lead the United Nations as it searches for peace in Africa and elsewhere in the coming year.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the effective manner in which he guided the work of the previous session. I extend my gratitude to the Secretary-General for his dedicated and exemplary contributions to the cause of peace.

Permit me also to welcome the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as new Members of our Organization.

It is a matter of deep concern that this year is witnessing the continuation of conflicts and the emergence of new sources of conflict. In particular, it is disturbing to note the growing tendency to resort to the use or threat of force. This has become a grave danger to the independence and unity of States as well as to regional and international peace and security. This year has recorded some of the bloodiest inter-State and intra-State conflicts, in Africa, Asia and Europe.

Sub-Saharan African has been the part of the world that has suffered most from those conflicts. Sub-Saharan Africa's economic performance and political stability have, in fact, taken a turn for the worse in 1999. About one third of the 52 members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), all of them in sub-Saharan Africa, have been worse off economically in 1999 than they were in the previous year. Almost 20 countries have been afflicted by armed civil conflict or inter-State war. It is not surprising that almost all of the countries that have suffered economic relapse are the ones that are embroiled in conflict.

Among those 20, the worst are to be found in the Horn of Africa. More than two thirds of their people are living in abject misery. Most have little or no food. They are ridden with disease. The economies of most of those countries are in shambles. The region is politically unstable and racked by conflict. It is no surprise, therefore, that some donor States and international financial institutions have rightly denounced the state of affairs and have informed a few of those States that they would be better advised to feed their hungry millions and better manage their economies than squander countless millions to finance ill-advised military adventures.

In his report on Africa, Secretary-General Kofi Annan made it amply clear that economic stagnation and poverty are a direct function of conflict. However, this is as evident elsewhere as it is in Africa. Thus, the situations in East Timor, Afghanistan, Kosovo or Bosnia and Herzegovina are no different from those in the Horn of Africa, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Angola. In all those cases, conflicts have caused serious setbacks in development plans and negatively impacted on the living conditions of the people. In almost all cases, conflict has been the intrinsic cause of famine and serious violations of human rights and other humanitarian crises. The international community cannot afford complacency in the face of such threats to international peace and security, if it is to be believed that peace is indivisible and that what happens in one region will have an impact on others.

Various reasons, including ethnic and religious hatred, economic and political grievances and unemployment, have been advanced as the root causes of conflict. While these are valid factors, it must never be forgotten that territorial expansionism, both within and outside the State, and the determination to achieve it by the use or threat of military force and by political and economic coercion against the territorial integrity and independence of neighbouring countries, has been the major cause of conflict and the disturbance of peace in the Horn of Africa. Eritrea, the victim of Ethiopia's territorial ambitions and its policy of aggression, is one example of this.

It has now been 16 months since the eruption of the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the root cause of which is Ethiopia's avowedly ethnic-based policy of territorial aggrandizement and its systematic annexation of large areas of Eritrean territory. From the beginning of the conflict, Eritrea has consistently pursued a policy of peaceful resolution of the border problem even in the face of provocation, creeping annexation of its territory and outright aggression. To that end, it had attempted, before the eruption of the conflict, to engage the Ethiopian Government in peaceful dialogue to amicably resolve all existing problems and controversies related to their common border. Even after the start of the conflict, Eritrea on several occasions requested the Ethiopian side to agree to accept bilateral negotiations. When this was rejected by Ethiopia, Eritrea unilaterally issued a proposal which contained detailed modalities for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. That too was rejected by the Ethiopian regime.

After the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was seized of the matter, Eritrea accepted, despite its grave reservations, the Framework Agreement submitted to both parties following the Ouagadougou summit of June 1998, after it had received the clarifications it had sought on several critical issues. Eritrea also readily and unequivocally accepted, at the Algiers OAU summit in July 1999, the modalities for the implementation of the Framework Agreement. The modalities were in fact drawn up to satisfy the unjust, unfair and unwarranted new preconditions made by Ethiopia on the basis of its own unilateral interpretation of the Framework Agreement. Eritrea declared that it was accepting the modalities only in the interests of peace and of the good of both the Ethiopian and the Eritrean peoples. Finally, Eritrea also accepted without any delay the technical arrangements for the implementation of the Framework Agreement and modalities which were submitted to both parties on 23 August 1999.

Implementation of the provisions of the Framework Agreement would entail, *inter alia*, the following: it would require a cessation of hostilities, the redeployment of the troops of both sides from disputed territories and the deployment of peacekeeping forces in those areas. Eritrea is fully committed to this. It would require investigation of the sequence of events to determine the origins of the conflict. Eritrea welcomes this since it would conclusively identify the real aggressor. The Framework Agreement envisages the investigation of human rights abuses. Eritrea awaits the results eagerly. Implementation would determine the exact borders between the two countries. Eritrea is enthusiastic about this. Eritrea is certain that the international community too is just as eager and enthusiastic about finding the final truth on all these and other related matters.

On the other hand, the Ethiopian Government was determined to achieve its territorial ambitions by all means, fair or foul. To this end, in 1997 and 1998, members of the armed forces and militia of the Ethiopian Government systematically used brute force to expel Eritreans from Eritrean lands and to incorporate southern and south-eastern Eritrean territories into Ethiopia. That Government then rejected all Eritrean overtures on direct peace talks and continued feverishly to prepare for new aggression even as it paid lip service to the Framework Agreement. On 6 February 1999, it launched an invasion along several sectors of our common boundary, even while peace facilitators from the United Nations and the United States were engaged in shuttle diplomacy to bring the conflict to an end. Sadly, tens of thousands of Ethiopians and many Eritreans perished or were wounded during that aggression.

When Eritrea accepted the Framework Agreement, Ethiopia came out with new preconditions based solely on its own interpretation of the Agreement, rather than joining Eritrea in the implementation of the peace plan. Yet Ethiopia was to accept the modalities — which were actually formulated to satisfy its unfair, unjust and unwarranted demands — only after much prevarication and procrastination. Finally, Ethiopia issued a statement on 4 September 1999 which was tantamount to a rejection of the technical arrangements, which are only a procedure for implementing the Framework Agreement and the modalities, on the untenable grounds that it contained elements which were not part of the previous two documents. One week later, on the eve of the Ethiopian new year, in a reiteration of Ethiopia's previous declaration of war, its President publicly announced that Ethiopia would use force to impose its

will over disputed territory. That was a blatant repudiation of the OAU effort, all of whose documents had been endorsed by the United Nations and other concerned organizations and Governments.

The OAU has given Ethiopia clear and unambiguous clarifications in response to its queries and concerns. It is also to be recalled that the OAU had decided, and both parties had accepted, that any interpretation of the documents would be made solely by the OAU and its current Chairman. The OAU and the United Nations have also agreed to become guarantors of the scrupulous implementation of all the provisions of the OAU peace package. Ethiopia's latest threat of war and its consequent repudiation of its commitment to the OAU peace process, which is inflexible about the peaceful resolution of the conflict, are thus in contempt of the OAU, the United Nations and the international community. Ethiopia's refusal to accept the technical arrangements until its new set of preconditions are met is holding the peace process hostage in spite of the clamour of the international community for the acceptance and quick implementation of the peace plan.

However quixotic and unjustifiable it may be, the Ethiopian Government has declared that it will not accept the technical arrangements until it receives from the OAU a firm assurance of Ethiopian sovereignty over the disputed areas. Obviously, this is a direct contradiction of, and a frontal assault on, the Framework Agreement, whose provisions clearly declare that the

> "redeployment will not prejudge the final status of the area concerned, which will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation of the border and, if need be, through an appropriate mechanism of arbitration". *(S/1998/1223, annex, p. 25)*

Surely, the proposition that a State must *a priori* be awarded full sovereignty over contested territory before the determination of ownership must distort the norms of international law and international relations. Ethiopia has also claimed that its decision to use force to control contested areas was taken in self-defence. Such a notion relegates the concept of self-defence to the realm of self-help.

It is not difficult to conclude which party to the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict has undertaken to fulfil in good faith its obligations under the OAU peace package and which party is determined to undermine, by direct or indirect aggression, the Charters of the United Nations and the OAU, thereby endangering peace, security, stability and peaceful development in our region. It is not difficult to determine which of the parties is resolved to bring about territorial changes, in clear violation of the OAU and United Nations Charters, by aggression, coercion, infiltration and subterfuge. A perfunctory analysis of the media — particularly the broadcast media — of both countries will also reveal which of the parties is fanning the flames of ethnic hatred and is actively engaged in propaganda and in preparation for a new war, thereby committing a crime against peace. In short, it is very easy to identify which of the parties is committed to peace and which is committed to war and aggression.

Once again, war clouds are looming ominously over our region. It is now self-evident that the Ethiopian Government is still determined to pursue a policy predicated on violent aggression. By its shrill war hysteria, the Government of Ethiopia is making it clear that it is poised to invade our country yet again. It is not our wish to fight. The bitter experience of a long war of independence has taught us to dread war. We seek no territorial expansion, and we have no plan to commit aggression against any other State. We seek to live in peaceful cooperation with all our neighbours. Yet if war is imposed on us we must — and will — fight to safeguard the sovereignty of our country and to preserve our dignity as a people. In this connection, Eritrea solemnly declares in this Assembly that the responsibility for any new military engagement will lie with the Addis Ababa regime.

We have exercised prudence and patience in the face of aggression, provocation and crimes committed by the Government of Ethiopia against our nationals in Ethiopia and Eritrea. A State has the duty to protect its nationals from injury caused by the Government of any State. Yet Eritrea has hitherto preferred to react with equanimity to the gross and violent violations of the human rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in the hope of securing a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

However, there are limits to the misdoings that any respectable State must tolerate. It would be unacceptable for any Government worthy of the trust of its people not to defend the State and the people it represents against aggression. It would be an unthinkable calamity for a people which had fought for so long, endured unimaginable hardship and won its independence against all odds to lose its rights as a people and a nation to an aggressor.

It is incumbent on those who love freedom and justice and respect the equality of peoples, who are committed to peace and cherish the norms and principles of the United Nations, to ensure that law and moral principles prevail against international lawlessness and immorality.

Ethiopia's threatened aggression must be a source of deep concern to the international community and particularly to the OAU and the United Nations which have consistently urged both parties to restrain themselves from the use or threat of force and to solve the conflict by peaceful means.

To this end, the international community must insist that both parties recognize and respect each other's right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders. It is for this reason that Eritrea believes that this Assembly has the duty to uphold the decision of the OAU, which has already been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, and calls upon the Assembly to denounce Ethiopia's renewed preparation for war against Eritrea and to demand that it accept and implement the OAU peace package. Surely, if there is any lesson that must have been learned in the last 16 months, it is that nothing can be gained, and everything may be lost, by continued warfare.

Therefore, the Government of Eritrea calls upon the United Nations and the international community to: first, condemn Ethiopia's commitment to the use and threat of force; secondly, establish a short time-frame within which Ethiopia must definitively respond to the peace package; thirdly, take timely and appropriate measures for the immediate and unconditional implementation of the OAU peace plan in its entirety; and, fourthly, immediately deploy an observer mission to identify the aggression in the event of renewed conflict.

The President: I next give the floor to the Minister of External Relations of Angola, His Excellency Mr. Joao Bernardo de Miranda.

Mr. Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me, to begin, Sir, by congratulating you on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Angola, and on my own behalf, on your election as president of the General Assembly at this fifty-fourth session. Your election to such an important post is recognition of your experience, ability and diplomatic capacity, as well as of Namibia's role internationally. Angola and Namibia not only share a long common border, but also have close political, economic, cultural and historical links. We sincerely hope that your mandate will be crowned with success.

Our congratulations also go to the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the excellent work carried out during his mandate.

To the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, we would like also to express our thanks for the wise and transparent manner in which he has led our Organization.

It is also a pleasure for us to welcome the new members of the United Nations, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Their accession reflects the universal nature of the principles and rules of the United Nations Charter. Angola is convinced that these States will be able to successfully take up their responsibilities, thereby contributing to the strengthening of our Organization and the stability and development of the South Pacific region and the world as a whole.

For half a century, the Organization has carried out activities to promote the ideals contained in its Charter. With the end of the cold war we thought that large-scale fratricidal wars would be things of the past; that the world would no longer experience tension and insecurity; that by now we would be in a position to welcome a narrowing of the gap between the rich and poor countries; that a significant part of humanity would be free from the danger of dying of poverty and misery. However, these things have not happened. The world is hostage to itself. There is a plethora of new armed conflicts as a result of hatred and racial, ethnic and religious intolerance; of the denial of people's right to self-determination; and even of the unfathomable ambition of certain politicians to take power by force or to attempt to thwart peoples' sovereign will to choose their own destinies.

The proliferation of armed conflicts is, to some extent, a reflection of the absence of an international security system under the aegis of the United Nations that would be able to respond immediately and correctly to potential conflicts. Despite instability in various areas of the world, there has been a weak commitment to establishing such a security system because of a lack of political will on the part of certain members of the international community. This indicates that the world is still very far from achieving the long-desired peace and development. Worse yet is the fact that certain entities of

international law approach the need for peace in the world from a perspective of material and global strategic interests — and at the expense of the universal human values.

It weighs on our conscience to see that we still have a long way to go to find solutions to situations of this nature, and that the international community's reactions to similar situations of human suffering are not consistent.

These facts might lead us to believe that we are dealing with a double standard and with measured policies that are at variance with the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations. The United Nations and the international community as a whole have the political, legal and moral duty to work a little harder, so that peoples facing the scourge of the war will be able to achieve lasting peace. The main objective of the United Nations can be achieved worldwide, provided that there is coherence and determination in the application of principles and decisions.

The global tolerance of impunity has been encouraging the leaders of the rebel groups proliferating throughout the world to carry out their terrorist and destructive campaigns, the main victim of which is civil society. The differential treatment accorded to identical situations of systematic and massive violations of human rights and the war crimes that are occurring in some areas of the world makes it impossible for the international justice system to act with the required effectiveness in dealing with some of the most barbaric and bloodthirsty criminals that Africa has seen this century. We are convinced that if the political and moral power of the United Nations were exerted against all the perpetrators of serious crimes, it would dishearten all those who might be willing to resort to subversion and terrorism. Thus the international community would be preventing the emergence of new conflicts.

We are fully aware that States have the primary responsibility for paving the way for the prevention of conflicts. The implementation of democracy, which may promote respect for human rights and the establishment of neighbourly relations, may be able to contribute to preventing the occurrence of conflicts. Indeed, many of the current crises would not have lasted long if the States involved in them had, in good faith, fully complied with their international obligations as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and as established by regional organizations. I refer in particular to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. For this reason, the mechanisms for the fulfilment of such international obligations by States should be further reinforced.

The Government of the Republic of Angola commends the work undertaken by the Secretary-General regarding the reinforcement of the preventive diplomacy mechanisms. However, the increase in the number of wars, particularly since 1998, leads us to conclude that the efforts in this regard still fall short of reaching the objectives. It is thus necessary for us to strive to create the institutional capacity for conflict prevention, including regional early-warning mechanisms.

Regarding conflict resolution, Angola's experiences force us to stress that there is an urgent need to re-define methods and strategies, mainly in the field of peacekeeping operations. Other factors underlying the limited success of some peacekeeping missions carried out under the aegis of the United Nations are: the obvious frailty of the verification systems of peace agreements; the tendency to treat similarly the violator and the fulfiller of these agreements; the overlooking of early signs that suggest a lack of political will and ill-faith by one of the sides; and the subsequent delayed application of coercive measures.

As a member State of the international community we need to rely on and have recourse to the United Nations in its important role regarding the issues of peacekeeping and security in the world. Angola will continue to believe that, in order to establish peace in the world, the United Nations role is of paramount importance. We simply want to suggest that, given the current international situation, this role should be played in a more realistic and effective way, with a view to living up to the expectations of people eager for peace and to ensuring the credibility of our Organization.

I would like now to refer to the situation in Angola, where five years have passed since the Lusaka Protocol was signed between the Government and UNITA. However, the main tasks involved in attaining a lasting peace have not yet been achieved. In particular, UNITA has not been completely disarmed and State authority has not been restored in the illegally occupied areas. Rather, the persistent refusal of the rebels to fully honour their obligations and their preference for taking power by force have plunged the country into a new era of violence.

Following this rejection of the people's will, as expressed at the polls during the 1992 general elections, and the non-fulfilment of the provisions of the three

peace accords entered into with the Government — in 1989 in Gbadolite, in the former Zaire; in 1991 in Portugal and in 1994 in Lusaka — Mr. Savimbi is still interested in continuing his destabilization campaign. This includes preventing the smooth running of the democratic institutions, destroying cities, towns, villages, infrastructure and public and private assets; and mercilessly killing civilians. In this way he has been condemning to misery, disease and famine all of the people in Angola.

As a result of these actions, in addition to the thousands of civilians who have already been killed, almost 3 million others have left their homes in search of refuge in the Government-controlled areas. Those communities require humanitarian assistance from the international community. In the framework of the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, the Government has, in good faith, undertaken all the tasks provided for it in the peace accords, in spite of the fact that Savimbi and his military wing have resumed the war. The Government continues to ensure the functioning of the democratic institutions resulting from the general elections, and UNITA members are represented in the Government and the parliament.

In the national armed forces, military troops, officials and soldiers appointed by UNITA remain faithful to the ideals of democracy and national accord. Only Mr. Savimbi and a fairly reduced number of qualified personnel who remain faithful to him are still interested in making war with a view to taking power. All of Savimbi's propaganda of recent years has merely been playing for time and anticipating that developments on the international scene might come out in his favour. His false messages on negotiations, allowing him time to prepare the ground for new military adventures, are elements of that strategy.

Indeed, what remains to be done in the Angolan peace process is to enforce what was negotiated in-depth at Lusaka over an entire year, particularly the disarming of all of Mr. Jonas Savimbi's military forces and the restoration of state administration throughout the national territory. The Angolan Government has long waited for Savimbi to decide to opt for peace. Angola is currently facing other political and economic challenges that cannot be indefinitely postponed as a result of the actions of a single power-hungry individual who considers war to be the only way to fulfil his personal plans. Furthermore, in rejecting Savimbi's posture, many UNITA militants and leaders have distanced him from the party. These women and men are working in good faith to consolidate the Angolan democratic process.

Given Savimbi's obstructionist behaviour, the Security Council decided to impose global mandatory sanctions against UNITA, including the prohibition of international travel for top UNITA officials directly involved in the Angola war project. In the same vein, and as a result of the crimes that Savimbi has been committing against the civilian population, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) declared him a war criminal and thus an unreliable stakeholder in the implementation of peace in Angola. The Non-Aligned Movement, in its ministerial meeting of 23 September 1999 held here in New York, expressed its strong support for the resolution adopted at the recent OAU Summit, which deems Mr. Savimbi a war criminal and requires that he be treated as such by the entire international community. We trust that there is no further doubt about the criminal nature of Mr. Savimbi or the need for him to be held responsible internationally for his crimes and actions.

The Angolan Government reiterates its ongoing commitment to paving the way for a lasting peace and, to that end, to making use of all the means at its disposal and undertakes to proceed with the process of national reconciliation and social democratization. A clear demonstration of its commitment is the fact that, despite the war climate pervading the country, at no time whatsoever has the Government denied the rights and individual liberties of citizens or of national legal political forces.

In the framework of the political reforms initiated in 1991, a new constitution is being prepared in a process in which all political parties are participating. The new constitutional text will reinforce the rule of law and consolidate the type of society that we intend to establish in Angola: an economically prosperous one, under democratic rule of law and a State of social justice. In the economic context, the reforms will follow their course with a view to reinforcing the creation of other conditions for an effective market economy and of a more favourable environment for foreign investment.

In order to meet these challenges, we call for the support and solidarity of the international community, particularly regarding the implementation of sanctions imposed by the Security Council against UNITA, so that Angola can more rapidly achieve peace and consolidate and accelerate the economic reform process.

It is our sincere hope that the new initiatives of the Security Council, proposed by Ambassador Robert Fowler, Chairman of the Committee on Sanctions, as well as the support already expressed by some Governments and international institutions, may contribute significantly to reinforcing sanctions, dismantling the illegal diamond-trafficking network, which is subsidizing the war carried out by Savimbi, and bringing its perpetrators before the court.

In tandem with its efforts to implement peace, the Angolan Government is also committed to implementing social impact economic programmes and to relaunching the basis for the resettlement of communities with a view to economically rehabilitating the country. In this regard, we wish to call upon all United Nations Member States to support the draft resolution that Angola will submit to the General Assembly on economic rehabilitation. In addition to lending their support to the draft resolution, we call on our partners particularly to participate in the economic rehabilitation of Angola.

The disarming of anti-personal landmines is another task that requires the ongoing involvement and support of the international community. The Angolan Government will remain engaged at the national, regional and international levels in order to overcome that scourge. A clear demonstration of this determination is the fact that we were one of the first State parties to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

The security, stability and territorial integrity of Angola and its neighbours depend on the stability of the region. We are currently facing a dangerous increase of destabilization which, if not controlled, may seriously affect the development of that part of the continent. Angola will continue to lend its support, under SADC, to the implementation of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Ceasefire Agreement signed in Lusaka and its complete fulfilment will pave the way for the return of refugees and the initiation of dialogue between the Congolese political forces, to which falls the responsibility of deciding the destiny of their country. The United Nations and the OAU are also called upon to play a crucial role in the establishment of a lasting peace. It would be reasonable for the invading countries to make a gesture by withdrawing from Congolese territory and ceasing to expand their occupation.

In the African Horn, Angola welcomes the acceptance by the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea of the Framework Agreement prepared by the OAU with a view to settling the dispute between the two countries. We wish to call upon both countries to demonstrate flexibility in order to ensure that a peace agreement, taking into account the interests of their peoples, can be celebrated.

With respect to Somalia, we call upon the international community to support the efforts of the OAU to reconcile the political and military factions and to establish an elected Government so that the country can resume its place in the community of nations.

In Western Sahara, the fulfilment of the Ceasefire Agreement enabled the further development of the joint efforts of the United Nations and the OAU leading to the holding of a referendum. Angola expects the process to be transparent and fair and that both parties shall accept the verdict of the Sahraoui people.

Concerning East Timor, whose people is connected to Angola by a shared language and a historical past of struggle against Portuguese colonization, we were disturbed by the acts of violence that followed the announcement of the results of the popular consultation. The decision of East Timor's people in favour of self-determination and independence should be respected. It is now the United Nations responsibility to prepare an enabling environment. In this regard, we strongly support the dispatch of a United Nations international peace force.

As to the Middle East, Angola welcomes the celebration of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that have enabled the peace process to be relaunched. It is our view that the new agreements conform to the aspirations of the respective peoples to living in peace and security.

The Government of the Republic of Angola and its people are concerned about the difficult political, economic and social situation of the Cuban people, which has worsened under the ongoing economic embargo imposed on their country. We hope that the matter will be resolved through a constructive bilateral dialogue.

The latest international developments and the challenges of the next millennium require that the United Nations and its main bodies, particularly those dealing with peace and security, economic development and the

administration of international justice, be adjusted to the new situation.

Reform and an increase in the membership of the Security Council will be crucial to making the decision-making process more transparent. In this respect, it is essential that all the regions of the world be represented equally. Angola reaffirms the position of the non-aligned countries on the reform of the Security Council, as well as the common African position adopted by the OAU.

Despite the progress achieved in some economies and the disappearance of the signs of a new world depression, the international economic situation continues to be characterized by serious imbalances. The root causes of the difficult situation faced by some developing countries include the unfair system governing international economic, monetary and financial relations; the adoption of protectionist measures; the unilateral nature of world trade; and the worsening of the external debt, which has become a heavy burden for the developing countries.

It is necessary to take concrete measures which may lead to structural changes in international economic relations and may contribute to the balance of the world economy. To this end, there should be a serious and transparent will in the North-South dialogue.

The President: I call on the Minister for Internal Affairs of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency Mr. Hiroshi Yamamura.

Mr. Yamamura (Marshall Islands): Mr. President, on behalf of my delegation, I congratulate you on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I bring you warm greetings from His Excellency President Imata Kabua of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. He asks that I bring to the attention of the General Assembly the various concerns that we wish to see addressed this year.

As the Assembly knows, the Marshall Islands was chosen for nuclear testing activities for the good of mankind. It did not turn out to be so fortunate for many of our people. The testing displaced many, and many were affected by the contamination. The Marshall Islands continues to be haunted by a legacy of nuclear testing and the destruction that accompanied it. My own home island, Utrik, was severely affected, and as I speak today we feel that there has not been a full reckoning of this dreadful part of our history. We have spoken about the medical effects, the high costs of treating the victims and the costs of rehabilitating the affected areas. A recent study has proved that the thyroid cancer rate in the population alive at the time of the testing is very high. We are experiencing the effects of these ailments decades after the end of the tests. The medical and social problems that were caused do not seem likely to go away.

That being said, there are some positive developments arising from our talks with our former Administering Authority. Recent discussions have highlighted the need to move forward with positive measures, and this is something we fully support. The problems we face are, however, very difficult, and the international expertise we require is simply not forthcoming. We therefore reiterate the call we made at the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference that such expertise for medical measures, as well as scientific and technical assistance, must be made available. We have sought to have the year 2000 Review Conference fully reflect this concern. If these issues are not addressed, it is our considered view that non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament in general will be a hollow achievement.

I am grateful, Mr. President, for the efficient manner in which you conducted the proceedings of the twenty-second special session. That session will serve as a highlight among our achievements this year, and I hope that it will usher in a new dawn of international cooperation with the small island developing States.

The concerns that were raised at the special session need not be repeated here. However, we must now look at how to integrate these concerns into other work of the United Nations in the field of sustainable development. It would be counterproductive if the outcomes from last week were not fully reflected in our other deliberations. The full agenda before the Second Committee is indicative of the continued concern with these issues. We will seek to ensure full reflection of the special session at the appropriate time. At the national level we will do our part through the National Commission on sustainable development. At the regional level we will cooperate with the other organizations of the Pacific island countries.

The interlinkages between various conventions and sustainable development efforts have always been clear to my delegation. We are deeply concerned with climate change and the devastating effect it may have on our livelihood, culture, natural resources, the economy and our very existence. Climate change is with us now. It

must be stressed that bad weather is not climate change. However, the extreme events that have been observed in recent years are indications of what is to be expected from climate change. Climate change is the disease, and what we are observing are the symptoms.

In the Pacific we have experienced a number of severe weather events and changes to our normal climate. Kiribati and the northern Cook Islands have become wetter, while Fiji and Tonga have become drier. In Samoa the difference between daytime and night-time temperatures has decreased. The southern Cook Islands and Tonga have also become warmer. The drought that hit the Marshall Islands last year was so bad that households could not get even two hours of fresh water per week.

For small island developing States it is not just a question of waiting to see what the research will say. We have to take action now. What happens to the small islands will impact on the rest of the world sooner rather than later. We also expect that the industrialized countries will take precautionary measures. Anything less is an invitation to the genocide of island peoples around the world.

The industrialized countries should urgently reduce their emissions, and others should follow suit. We ourselves are taking steps to limit our already very small emissions. Part of our effort is to develop our renewable energy sector. In this regard, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Government has approved a solar energy policy. The first stage will be a project to install solar panels on all the outer island health centres and one of the high schools. With the support of the United Nations Trust Fund for New and Renewable Sources of Energy and the Government of Italy, we hope to begin implementing this project very soon, as well as the overall policy. The policy will assist us in generating sustainable livelihoods in the outer island communities.

The Marshall Islands was honoured to host the Alliance of Small Island States workshop on climate change this year, and we commend the outcome to all Governments. We would like to express our appreciation to Italy, Norway, the United States, Canada and Switzerland for supporting the workshop and the United Nations Trust Fund for providing the experts.

As the custodian of three-quarters of a million square miles of ocean, the Marshall Islands is continuing its endeavours to seek equitable solutions for the governance of the oceans. We are cognizant that the activities that take place in our neighbouring seas will have an effect on the sustainable development of the marine resources within our exclusive economic zone.

Unsustainable fishing practices such as the use of drift nets and small mesh sizes must therefore be banned forever. The Marshall Islands has been working together with the Pacific island countries to develop a regional treaty that would address implementation of fisheries conservation and their sustainable management. Various aspects of importance include the need for data collection, vessel monitoring systems, and greater support for our patrol boats. We also need to look at limiting the fleets permitted to fish in our waters; this would also assist us in further developing our domestic fleet.

My Government applauds the efforts of the Pacific Forum, in particular the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea who, in cooperation with the Rio Group, has brought this matter forward. We will continue to seek common-sense solutions to the vexing problems that confront us in ocean matters.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Marshall Islands has responsibility for and is predominantly focused on the social development and improvement in the lives of our people in the outer island communities. One such example is the solar power project I mentioned. We are constantly engaged in seeking solutions to address these concerns, one such event being national economic and social summit. Through the outcome of that summit, we are striving to bring about the partnerships that these communities require for their economic and social development. Many exciting new ideas have come forward, especially for the development of agriculture, fisheries and sustainable tourism. What is lacking is concerted donor support, but we are hopeful that with detailed and pragmatic proposals this situation will change.

Earlier this year, at the Preparatory Committee for the follow-up to the Copenhagen Social Summit, I outlined some of the problems we face and the possible solutions we proposed. Those ideas are still valid. My delegation will continue to stress the need for support for these efforts during this session and at the special session on social development next year.

Women's rights are a cornerstone of the Marshall Islands Constitution. As a matrilineal society, we have a cultural attachment to the promotion of the rights of all people, but especially for the women of our society. We have in place a unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs to

assist in the implementation of our policy on women and to address the achievements of women in our society. I can inform the Assembly that a national caucus of women was recently established to increase further their involvement in the political decision-making process. My delegation will actively participate in the preparatory work for the special session on the implementation of the Beijing Conference to be held next year.

Equally important to the Marshall Islands are human rights in the general sense. We have tried to give practical implementation to the ideals that we all hold dear. The Marshall Islands Constitution defines respect for human rights as the fundamental obligation of the Government. It sets out the basic parameters for the holding of free elections, the right of free speech and thought, and the right to economic and social development. We hold these principles in high regard, and indeed we are currently in the process of holding general elections to the Parliament and to the local governments. The elections are free and fair, and open to the most stringent oversight to ensure there is no interference in the free choice of the people.

In line with our efforts to consolidate our democracy and our free institutions, we are looking at the opportunities in the various human rights instruments of the United Nations. I hope to be able to report soon that we will become party to the most important of these instruments, even though I would contend that our Constitution already gives full voice to these rights. In this regard, we were very heartened to hear what the Secretary-General had to say on the subject. We think that he pinpointed the real issue here: that it is people who are the most important, that it is adherence to human rights that we must safeguard. We will support all efforts to see to it that new initiatives are given proper consideration.

As a small but determined democracy, the Marshall Islands supported the inclusion of the agenda item on the need to examine the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan and ensure that the fundamental right of its 22 million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations is fully respected. We hope to achieve a resolution of this matter in the near future. There is still a need for an ad hoc committee to be established to examine the matter further.

The United Nations has come a long way on the path to reform, which we all know is an ongoing process, never a single event. My delegation congratulates the Secretary-General for his outstanding efforts, he deserves our full support and thanks. But the reforms so far made are in jeopardy because of the continued non-payment of contributions by certain Members. This is intolerable and cannot continue: the support from Member States cannot falter. We must all pay our dues on time, in full and without conditions.

As part of this reform process, we too have noted the anomalies in the regional groupings here at the United Nations. We think it is high time to review this matter, as Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Samoa have all eloquently pointed out.

There is also a need to finalize the reform of the Security Council. In this regard, I wish to thank the delegation of Italy for its reasonable and logical contribution to our debate on this matter.

We must also ensure that the United Nations agencies are responsive to the special needs of the developing countries. The Marshall Islands has benefited to some extent from various United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) projects. We feel that more can be done, and we look forward to increasing our cooperation with United Nations agencies, such as UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others.

In conclusion, Mr. President, you can count on the full support and cooperation of the Marshall Islands delegation to assist you in bringing our deliberations to a fruitful conclusion.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, the Assembly has heard, not for the first time, statements by the Israeli representative against peace — statements based on the falsification of facts and attempts to mislead the international community. The

statement by the Israeli representative yesterday was but an expression of the policy of the previous Israeli Government, a policy that we hope will not be pursued by the new Government.

Secondly, the denial by the Israeli representative in his statement yesterday of the message transmitted by former Prime Minister Rabin to Syria in July 1994 through the United States, the sponsor of the peace process, shows either that the representative is ignorant of the existence of the message or that he has chosen purposely to ignore it because of his enmity for peace. That peace proceeds from relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the formula of full withdrawal in return for comprehensive peace.

Thirdly, our intention now is not merely to rebut the statement by the Israeli representative. It is primarily, as I stated yesterday, to inform the international community, which supports the achievement of a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East, of the developments on the Syrian track during the peace talks under the mandate of former Prime Minister Rabin.

The United States Secretary of State informed Syria at that time — in July 1994 — of Rabin's agreement to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967 as an ineluctable commitment to proceed to a full treatment of the remaining elements of a full peace agreement. It must be stated in this context that President Hafez Al-Assad had put two questions to the former Secretary of State of the United States at the time, to ascertain the accuracy and correctness of the substance of this Israeli commitment as transmitted to Syria then.

The first question was: Does Rabin mean that Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will include all the territories that were under Syrian sovereignty on 4 June 1967? The reply of the United States Secretary of State was "Yes". The second question put by President Assad was: Is there any Israeli claim to any tract of land inside the 4 June 1967 line? The reply of the United States Secretary of State was that there was no such claim.

Fourthly, the statement of the Syrian Arab Republic made by Mr. Farouk Al-Shará, Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic before this session of the Assembly affirmed that the message does not in itself represent a peace agreement. It is, however, a fundamental part of that agreement, an agreement whose remaining parts that pertain to normal peaceful relations and to security arrangements, based on the principles and objectives set, with the sponsorship and participation of the United States of America, should be implemented.

Mr. Al-Shará also affirmed in his statement that Syria did not wish to let this opportunity for peace be lost. However, if it were indeed to be lost again, Israel alone would bear the responsibility.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) *(spoke in Spanish)*: I should like to refer to the statement made this morning by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia. I reiterate that there is no territorial or border problem pending between Chile and Bolivia. The borders between the two countries were definitively established in 1904 by the treaty of peace and friendship, which is still fully in force.

I should also recall that diplomatic relations between our countries were unilaterally suspended by Bolivia over two decades ago. Nevertheless, trade, investment, tourism and bilateral cooperation mechanisms are running smoothly. Chile is, as ever, willing to have a direct, unconditional dialogue with Bolivia to continue forging ahead with bilateral integration, for the further development of both peoples.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): It was bewildering to listen to the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia as he described his country as a victim of Eritrean aggression, a victim which had no choice but to wage war in self-defence. It is a case of the thief crying "Thief!" In fact, it is Ethiopia which has systematically committed aggression against Eritrea, and it is Eritrea which has since May 1997 been defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity against repeated Ethiopian aggression. Allow me to comment on that and a few other charges that were made.

On the question of aggression, I do not want to go into the details of the process, from the issuing of a new official map that changed the borders and included large chunks of Eritrean territory in Ethiopia to the systematic step-by-step incursion into that territory by force, leading to the eruption of the fighting. This has been documented in the past, and we can distribute documents to that effect. These are actual facts. I will simply say that the series of incidents, or incursions, culminated on 6 May 1998, with Ethiopian troops cold-bloodedly murdering a number of Eritrean officers and soldiers in the Badme area.

On 13 May 1998, the Ethiopian Parliament officially declared war on Eritrea. On 5 June 1998, the Addis

Ababa regime launched the first air strike against Eritrea's capital city, Asmara, attacked Eritrea throughout the common border and escalated what was a border skirmish into a full-scale war. In a governmental statement issued on 1 March 1999, entitled "Ethiopia is looking for a lasting peace", the Addis Ababa Government openly admits that its agenda extends to overthrowing the government of Asmara, which has become "a threat to the region".

The Ethiopian Minister declares that aggression must not be rewarded. The Eritrean delegation could not agree more. Aggression must, in fact, be severely punished. However, it is neither Eritrea nor Ethiopia but the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other parties which must determine the commission of aggression and the perpetrator of aggression. Paragraph 7 of the Framework Agreement is designed to do exactly that. It recommends that

> "In order to determine the origins of the conflict, an investigation be carried out on the incidents of 6 May 1998 and on any other incident prior to that date which could have contributed to a misunderstanding between the two parties regarding their common border, including the incidents of July-August 1997."

Eritrea is committed to, and readily awaits, the implementation of this and other relevant provisions. Ethiopia would also contribute to the determination of aggression by signing the technical arrangements.

Thirdly, the commitment to peace. It is well and good for the Addis Ababa regime to make a thousand and one claims about its commitment to a peaceful solution. It is quite another matter to translate words into deeds. Actions speak louder than words, and the Addis Ababa regime needs to take one and only one action to authenticate its commitment to peace: sign the technical arrangements and accept the peace package that has been presented by the OAU and which is supported by the United Nations and the entire international community.

Turning to the issue of sovereignty over disputed territory, Ethiopia, despite its claims to the contrary, has rejected the OAU peace plan on the pretext that the technical arrangements do not guarantee Ethiopia's sovereignty in its own territories. In effect, it is seeking iron-clad guarantees of sovereignty over the disputed territories. This would be like a football team refusing to play unless it is assured beforehand of victory. This would be farcical were it not deadly serious.

The Framework Agreement, the modalities and the OAU clarifications are crystal-clear on the matter. All three documents affirm that they are not meant in any way to question the sovereignty and authority of either of the two parties over the whole of its territory, it being mutually understood that the redeployment shall not prejudge the final status of the territories concerned, which will be determined at the end of the border delimitation and demarcation process. This is what the proposal says.

In spite of this clear message by the OAU, the United Nations and much of the international community, Ethiopia is demanding to be awarded the territories. In effect, it is demanding the amendment of the Framework Agreement and the modalities which it had hitherto accepted. These are not the words of a country which seeks peace. They are the words of a country that is in search of pretexts to commit further aggression.

Fifthly, with respect to the need for guarantees, it is a matter of verifiable historical record that it should be Eritrea, not Ethiopia, that should seek guarantees against aggression. Eritrea has never, by word or by deed, threatened or committed aggression against Ethiopia, nor is it doing so today. The Eritrean delegation wishes to inform the Assembly that Eritrea trusts the commitment of the OAU and the United Nations as guarantors of the peace, as provided for in the peace plan, which reads:

> "The Organization of African Unity and the United Nations will be the guarantors for the scrupulous implementation of all the provisions of the OAU Framework Agreement, the modalities for the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the technical arrangements for the implementation of the Framework Agreement and its modalities."

Sixthly, with regard to peace and stability in the region, it is again a matter of record that it is in fact Ethiopia that has become the major destabilizing force in the region. Its repeated invasions of Somalia with tanks, armoured vehicles and heavy artillery, its occupation of several towns and villages, and the murders and looting and destruction of property it has perpetrated have been verified by third-party observers. What is the truth? Ask the Somalis. Their repeated violations of Kenyan sovereignty under the pretext of hot pursuit of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters is also a matter of public record.

The next point is the historical role of the international community. Throughout history, Ethiopia has colluded and connived with colonial Powers in determining the course of the history of the region. A cursory glance at the colonial agreements in the Horn of Africa will reveal that Ethiopia was a partner and signatory of almost all of the colonial agreements on Djibouti, Somaliland, the Sudan and Kenya. Eritrea's forced federation with Ethiopia and its subsequent annexation by Ethiopia in violation of the United Nations resolution that arranged the federation, while the international community looked the other way, are but a few examples.

Even now, it is Eritrea which has been forced by the international community to make concession after concession for the sake of peace. And Ethiopia complains?

Lastly, I will turn to the unwarranted attacks on the State, Government and leadership of Eritrea. The vulgar attacks on the Government and leadership of my country are too contemptible to merit any serious response. Suffice it to say that an ethnic minority regime that has been accused of practicing ethnic apartheid by its own people and whose prisons are filled with political prisoners; which has been labeled an enemy of the free press; which has systematically violated the human rights of not only Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin but also its own people can hardly be considered as a candidate to give lectures on democracy and human rights.

However, it provides insight into the nature of a Government with which Eritrea and others in our region and beyond have to deal with — and endure.

Mr. Yemer (Ethiopia): Aggression, unfortunately, is a fact of international life. As long as there are aggressors, there will be aggression. Now having listened to the statement by the Foreign Minister of Eritrea this evening, I find it interesting to discern some distinguishing characteristics of aggressors, be they large or small.

In fact, this is intriguing, because they have displayed the same characteristics throughout history. Large or small, they share the same features.

There are several characteristics, and I will mention them in order of importance. First, the most distinguishing characteristic is that they play the victim while their aggression continues. The statements made by the Foreign Minister of Eritrea and by the representative who just spoke are clear testimony to that fact. The second distinguishing characteristic is that they are shrill, they make a lot of noise — more than the victims. Hitler used to do it; Mussolini used to do it. The victims are quiet, and the aggressors are shrill. Thirdly, they misrepresent the actual state of affairs — that is another characteristic of aggressors. That is their device. They like to hoodwink the international community.

Fourthly, they claim to be champions of peace — they become converts overnight. That is another characteristic of aggressors; in fact, that is the most common characteristic, and the latest example is provided by Eritrea. Another characteristic is that they lecture the rest of the world on the virtues of peace; they are condescending and gratuitous. Finally, and most regrettably, they underestimate the rest of the world, to the point of insulting its intelligence.

Eritrea is a small aggressor. All the same, it displays all the characteristics of aggressors. During the year and a half of its aggression against Ethiopia it has been showing all the characteristics of aggressors that I have just enumerated, and more. It is calling for peace while its invading army is sitting on Ethiopian land. It claims to have accepted, very belatedly, the peace proposals of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In fact, these are the very documents which it has been dismissing all along — dismissing not in normal language or in a civilized manner but with contempt and derision addressed not only to the proposals but also to the organization that is the author of the proposals. That is a matter of record, and it is clear from their statements and reactions to the various proposals made over the past year and a half — before they converted to a peace-loving State.

Why have they suddenly changed and come full circle, so that now they are professing peaceful intentions? Surely there has not been a change of heart, since aggressors cannot undergo a metamorphosis — to use a biological and scientific term — and become peace-loving overnight. That would be contrary to their nature, and Eritrea cannot be an exception to that rule. Rather, the turning point came in February 1999, when Eritrea was driven out of the biggest chunk of Ethiopian territory that it had occupied by force. No organization or third party has ever called upon Ethiopia to vacate or withdraw from Eritrean territory, because we have never been there. In fact, on the contrary, the OAU has always called for Eritrean troops to be redeployed from Ethiopian territory. No document exists calling upon us to withdraw from Eritrean territory, because we never invaded Eritrea or committed aggression against Eritrea.

When they say they left Ethiopian territory in the interests of a peaceful resolution of the dispute, that is where they underestimate the international community to the point of insulting its intelligence, as I said. That is outrageous. They claim they left not because they were evicted, but in the interests of peace. That is an insult to the OAU, never mind the rest of the international community. Eritrea's current posture of peace is no more than a veneer — it is a sham, which will be easily exposed. A veneer is a thin layer; it is a superficial or meretricious show; it is a gloss. Once the surface is scratched, the real thing appears. It gives an attractive surface appearance, concealing in particular defects of character, under a very superficial and specious attractiveness.

The posture we see displayed by Eritrea is a veneer. How do we scratch the veneer? We do so by revealing Eritrea's current destabilizing conduct in the Horn, while it is calling for peace with Ethiopia. Last week, the President of a State in the Horn of Africa clearly expressed the sincere belief that Eritrea would gain more as an equal partner in the collective regional effort to fashion comprehensive peace, augment development and address the challenges of environmental degradation than it would by pursuing a senseless and reckless policy of confrontation and destabilization. We did not say that; the President of the Republic of Djibouti said it from this very rostrum. Djibouti was, and still is, one of the victims of Eritrea's policy of destabilization.

The destabilizing conduct removes the veneer and exposes the real Eritrea, as I have said. In the final analysis, the question is one of trust — of trusting an aggressor. Obviously, a victim such as Ethiopia, in particular, cannot afford to trust the aggressor. Other States, which are not victims, might trust aggressors. They can afford to do so, because their land is not occupied. But we have to ensure that, however shrill Eritrea's profession of peace may be, no loophole remains that would allow the aggressor to take advantage. All we are saying is that there should be no departure from the basic — I repeat: the basic — OAU document, namely, the framework agreement. Eritrea's so-called acceptance of the framework agreement cannot be rewarded by departures from the basic document in subsequent implementing documents. No incentives should be provided to the aggressors to accept something which they should accept. Erosion of the fundamental principles of the framework agreement would be no less than appeasement.

Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to refer to the comments made by the Ambassador of Chile earlier today.

I was surprised that Chile exercised its right of reply with reference to the comments made by the Foreign Minister of Bolivia this morning, although I have no objection to its doing so. Representatives have the text of the statement of the Bolivian Foreign Minister and heard him speak; they know that his statement was constructive and positive. Furthermore, it is consistent with Ambassador Larraín's appeal for a dialogue without conditions. The Foreign Minister of Bolivia said that Bolivia is determined to call for a direct dialogue that would cover all issues relating to our relations with Chile, without conditions. In the past, it has been a condition of such a dialogue that the issue of access to the sea should not be discussed.

Furthermore, later in his statement, the Foreign Minister of Bolivia said:

> "I trust that very soon we will define, with Chancellor Valdés, the terms of that dialogue, which, in my opinion, should encompass the complete range of our relations and identify ways for the economic, cultural and political cooperation which will unite our nations". (*A/54/PV.20*)

So I believe we are in agreement. I welcome that agreement and believe that we must look forward to such a dialogue and inform the international community that these initial efforts will lead to a future dialogue between the Foreign Ministries of Bolivia and Chile.

As to the other comment, that there are no pending issues between us, we have been hearing it for 120 years; and Bolivia has been responding for 120 years. But I will not dwell on this, because I would then have to go in detail into the 1904 treaty by which Bolivia became a landlocked country. Let us look at positive elements and leave that situation for future discussion.

On more than eight occasions there has been dialogue with Chile, five of them in this century; unfortunately, for many reasons that I need not go into now, these talks have been unsuccessful. The fact that we have attempted negotiations on five occasions means that something is pending. But let us not get into a back-and-forth about this; I merely wanted to cite the comments of the representative of Chile and to note that they are in full agreement with the statement made this morning by

the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia on the need for direct dialogue on all the various issues with Chile, which will be defined by the Foreign Ministers of our two countries, Mr. Javier Murillo of Bolivia and Mr. Juan Gabriel Valdés of Chile.

Mr. Menkerios (Eritrea): I do not want to belabour the point, but want only to say that war, whether waged by fighting or by words, as it is here, is not going to get us nearer to a peaceful resolution of a border conflict that can and must be resolved peacefully. I think that what is most important at the end of the day is that there is a proposal that has been considered fair and just by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), by the Security Council and by the international community at large. Eritrea has made concessions, and it has accepted all these proposals. We did not draft the proposals; the OAU, in collaboration with the United Nations and the United States, did so. We have accepted them as a basis for a peaceful solution. It remains up to the Ethiopians to accept them, rather than offering arguments about why they are not accepting them now. Then we can go on and resolve this peacefully.

If they reject them, they are not rejecting Eritrea's proposals, because Eritrea did not draft those proposals. They are rejecting the proposals of the OAU and the whole international community; they will have to deal with that.

Mr. Gold (Israel): I wish only to reiterate the determination of the people of Israel to reach peace with all of Israel's neighbours, including peace with Syria. This is a commonly held wish and hope of all the people of Israel, to lead to a peace which will make Israel more secure tomorrow, not less secure. But what is required right now is to reiterate the clarification that I made yesterday in the name of the Government of Israel: that no commitment was provided in past negotiations to return specifically to a line of 4 June 1967, and that the basis of negotiations, as is well known by all States members of this body, is Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and the subsequent Council resolution 338 (1973). These have formed the basis of our negotiations since the time of the Madrid peace process.

The notion that no commitment was provided during 1994 or 1993, when we had an earlier Israeli-Syrian negotiation, is not only the policy that I stated just yesterday, but has been documented by those who were involved in those negotiations and who have written on them since, including our head negotiator in 1994, Israel's then Ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich.

I think, rather than take selected portions of the negotiating record and try and turn them into binding agreements that never existed, that were never signed, what it is necessary for the parties to do now to finally put an end to the Arab-Israel conflict in the year ahead is for Israel and Syria to meet face to face and settle these issues once and for all. We should remember that during those previous negotiations the parties were guided by a principle: nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. And if we sit together, face to face, the people of Israel and the Government of Israel are determined to reach peace with Syria, not in five years, not in three years, but this year. So let us sit down and get the negotiations under way.

Mr. Yemer (Ethiopia): The statement just made by the representative of Eritrea does not impel me to say anything new vis-à-vis what I said in my earlier statement. I have said enough about Eritrea's professions of peace, its sudden change of heart, its 180-degree turn; I have described Eritrea as an aggressor. I do not want to belabour the point now.

I would like to say for the record, in response to his statement, that I stand by every word of my previous statement.

The meeting rose at 8 p.m.